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A Wife's Honor

30/-

A WIFE'S HONOR.

A NOVEL.

BY ERNEST A. YOUNG,

AUTHOR OF "ONLY A WOMAN'S HEART," ETC.

"*Say, what is honor? 'Tis the finest sense*
Of justice which the human mind can frame,
Intent each lurking frailty to disclaim,
And guard the way of all offense
Suffered or done."

—[WORDSWORTH.

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-BY-

GEO. W. OGILVIE.

A WIFE'S HONOR.

CHAPTER I.

CHESTER'S WIFE.

"Undoubtedly he will relent and turn
From his displeasure."—*Milton.*

"I can go alone, Chester. You need not bore yourself with my society. It is altogether unnecessary."

The words were spoken with a *hauteur* of tone and gesture which were quite unusual to the speaker. She slowly arose from her half-reclining posture upon the rustic bench, and turned away with an assumption of indifference.

Chester Boynton, who had been lying upon the velvety grass near her for the last hour, slowly faced her, a slight frown setting upon his brow.

"I find it very pleasant here," he slowly said, a tinge of coldness in his tone.

"Then remain, by all means," the young wife retorted with the sharpness prompted by pique.

"I wouldn't have you disturb yourself to please me for anything," she continued, moving slowly, yet resolutely up the slope. "It appears we can do nicely without each other of late. When we are together something unpleasant is sure to be said, and we both get angry. Of course the blame all lies with me, for you think it does. It is strange that your wonderful power of reading human nature did not teach you better than to bind yourself for life to one of my disposition. For I didn't mean to deceive you. We quarreled before we were married!"

Mr. Boynton averted his face while she was speaking, whether to hide a smile or a frown could not be seen.

"You will fall into a better mood by and by, Tracy," he said.

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There was more of carelessness than reproach in his tones. It had better been plain reproach, for there is nothing so dangerous as an assumption of indifference toward a sensitive soul.

Mrs. Boynton was keenly sensitive, imaginative, affectionate. She was beautiful herself, and an admirer of the beautiful. There was much in her character which was rare and loveable; yet it was not goodness nor amiability without alloy. That never exists in this world—and it is perpetually looked for; hence arises perpetual disappointment.

Tracy Boynton quickened her steps, unmindful of the increasing steepness of the ascent. For the scene was upon a mountain side, near a small, quiet summer hotel perched upon a grassy plot with a steep, zigzag road below and an almost perpendicular pathway above. In a moment the young wife had passed beyond the view of Mr. Boynton.

Toward the base of the mountain the sides were covered with patches of verdure, mottled with gray rocks and shaded by clumps of trees. But as you ascended the way became steeper, and the rocks predominated, growing rugged and sharp. In places steps had been chiseled to make the heights more easily accessible. There were occasional tufts of grass and shrubbery all the way, growing from clefts, and sustained by thin patches of soil.

Tracy Boynton ran up the path with a reckless swiftness. There were places where a misstep would have cost her her life—or at best fractured limbs. But in the heat of her resentment she tempted fate. What if she should fall? she asked herself. Would her husband care? If he did care, why did he refuse to humor her wish, and climb the steep at her side?

Of course these questionings were unreasonable, and when the flash of anger was past she would see them to have been so. But now her resentful feelings were fed by them, and as she ran on and on she almost wished that she might fall and be killed—by accident.

She reached a small level space. There was a large tree—a white maple—shading the little oasis upon the ledgy mountain-side. It was a lovely spot, with its cool shade, the brisk breeze, the cool spring of water in a natural cleft, and the world bright and warm spread below.

Flushed and panting she sank down beside the tree, and leaned her throbbing brow against the rough bark. A few passionate tears came into her eyes. But she brushed them away with one slender hand, and gazed resolutely upon the enchanting landscape spread below.

The heat of her impulse passed away almost imperceptibly. She pesently found herself wondering if her husband was not even then climbing the ascent in quest of her. She bent eagerly forward, in hopes to catch a glimpse of him before he should perceive her.

But the moments passed and Chester Boynton did not appear.

"I'll wait till he does come?" she said aloud, her sweet face brightening with a smile.

"I'll cure him of his ugly whims," she continued, her tones half-playful, half resentful. "He is so glum of late that he needs stirring up. It is all because of those dreadful classics. He buries himself in them so deeply that it never occurs to him that his young wife is pretty and childish. For I *am* pretty, and I can see it so plainly in the face of everybody who looks at me. Not that I care about it, only for him. But for my husband I had as soon be as ugly as Herate!"

Tracy's soliloquy was as earnestly spoken as though it were to father-confessor. She rose to her feet and paced the level space to and fro. Then she went and drank from the spring, dipping the water with the cocoanut shell cup.

An hour passed. The delicious breeze suddenly died away, and as suddenly the brightness upon the landscape below became overcast by a dark, creeping shadow.

Tracy Boynton did not notice this shadow until it

reached the immediate vicinity of the huge maple. Then she was startled, not only by the increasing darkness, but by an abrupt, heavy rumble, as though a large boulder had become detached and was rolling down the mountain-side.

An upward glance explained it all, and Mrs. Boynton was thrilled by an impetuous wish to descend to the hotel.

It was one of those sudden summer storms, that come up so quickly, and sometimes develop so much fury. It had gathered in the southwest, and the heights of the mountain had hidden until it was nearly overhead.

Tracey started toward the path, bent upon leaving the spot which a moment before was so attractive, but which now had become so lonely.

Upon the instant, however, another impulse seized her, and she returned with resolute face to the spring, and seated herself upon a broad, flat rock.

"Chester must have seen the storm coming," she exclaimed aloud, her lips fluttering with a renewed sense of injury. "And he ought to have come in quest of me. How does he know that I am not detained by a mishap? Would he leave me to face the storm alone, upon the mountain-side? If he cares, he will come. If he doesn't come, then I will stay!"

The resolution once taken, found justification through a new course of reasoning. She was angry again; and in anger no decision can be right.

It soon became evident that she could not have reached the hotel before the storm broke, even if she had attempted to do so.

A swift, fitful gust swept through the great maple, causing it to shiver, as with dread. A dash of large rain drops at the same time splashed and rattled all around, and then ceased. Then came another dash, a dull gleam of lightning, a nearer growl of thunder, and last a low, increasing roar of falling rain.

Tracy Boynton was mortally afraid of lightning; she

had once received a shock from a passing bolt, and had never recovered from the sense of dread with which it had inspired her. And now realizing the loneliness and possible peril of her position, she crouched upon the rock, covered her face with her hands, and trembled with a wild, overpowering fear.

She was speedily drenched with the rain; little rivuelets trickled around her, while the rock upon which she sat threatened to become submerged. Yet she dared not stir. The lightning glared, the thunder crashed, and in the dread inspired by these, minor discomforts were forgotten.

The moments passed slowly enough. It seemed like an hour after the storm began that she was aroused from her lethargy of dread by a new sound. In reality the period was less then ten minutes.

She uncovered her face and sprang eagerly to her feet, with a cry of joy; Chester had come—no! It was not her husband. The one advancing was taller than Mr. Boynton, and unmistakably handsomer.

The man paused, staring at the slender, dripping figure before him. His clear, blue eyes expressed first, wonder; then recognition; and then, pleasure. He sprang forward, held out both hands in a frank, eager way.

"Tracy Sherman, as I live!" he cried.

His was a cheery, musical voice; and for the young wife of Chester Boynton it brought only pleasant recollections. She permitted her hands to rest for a moment in his cordial grasp, forgetting for the instant the situation and even her identity. But it all flashed back upon her quickly enough.

"You forget, Mr. Temple," she returned, a slight flush relieving the pallor of her face. "I'm no longer Tracy Sherman. I am—"

"Mrs. Chester Boynton," he supplied, as she hesitated. Did she imagine it? Or was there a tinge of regret in his tones, matched by a slight contraction of brow? If they were really present, they passed quickly enough.

Philip Temple could never wear a moody brow for more than a minute at a time.

"I did forget for an instant—because I was so surprised, I suppose," he went on. There came a vivid lightning flash just then, and the succeeding thunder was so heavy that he could not have made himself heard had he wished to do so.

Besides, Mrs. Boynton was holding her hands to her ears, to shut out the deafening crash.

"Isn't it terrible!" she breathlessly exclaimed, a moment later.

"Rather wet, to be sure," Mr. Temple replied. At the same time a look of amused perplexity came into his eyes, and he asked:

"Isn't this a new freak of yours, Tracy? I don't recollect ever seeing you select such a spot as this for witnessing a thunder storm. I thought you used to be timid."

"I am timid," she hastened to reply. Of course she could not tell him why she was there, nor why she had not returned to the hotel. So she hastened to add:

"I didn't see the storm until a moment before it began raining, so I preferred remaining to making an attempt at descent. It is so steep, you know."

"A wise decision. And your husband—he is at the hotel, I suppose?"

"It is more likely that he is looking for me," she declared, quickly. Not for the world would she have Philip Temple suspect the truth.

"And the poor fellow is doubtless in a fever of anxiety," the other hastened to say, adding:

"It is cruel to keep him in such suspense. Permit me to assist you to descend. The storm is nearly over. And then you can present me to your husband, for I've a curiosity to see such a lucky fellow!"

This was spoken in a light vein, and from another would not have been noticed by Mrs. Boynton. But she had reason to believe that this man by her side consid-

ered Chester Boynton as especially fortunate in winning what he had failed to secure.

Five years ago—how much had happened since !—she had refused an offer of marriage from Philip Temple. And this meeting upon the mountain-side, amid the din of the elements, brought back old memories with peculiar vividness. And, vaguely, she wondered if he had outlived his disappointment.

"Yes, let us descend," she said, with a nervous shiver. "There may be showers follow this one, and I should feel safer at the hotel."

She took his proffered arm, and together they began the descent. Reaching a level place, a short distance below, they paused to take breath.

The rain was falling heavily still, and it was evident that the storm had not spent itself. Indeed, it seemed to be gathering strength for another and stronger outburst.

They were about to proceed over the slippery rocks, when they were blinded by a vivid blaze of lightning, accompanied by a terrible crash.

Philip Temple caught the form of his companion in time to prevent her from falling down the declivity. For a moment her head dropped upon his shoulders, and her eyes were closed. But they opened quickly, and in time to behold a look upon his face which was not soon forgotten. At this juncture a third figure appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW COMER.

"Confidence then bore thee on; secure either to meet no danger or to find matter of glorious trial."—*Milton.*

The new comer was Chester Boynton, and he sprang forward with pallid face, at the same time Mrs. Boynton stood erect, summoning all her strength for the effort.

"Thank heaven!" the husband exclaimed, throwing a protecting arm about her tottering figure.

For a minute they stood mutely gazing at each other. A small tree within a dozen paces of where they were standing had been riven by the electric bolt, and it seemed as though their lives had been spared by a special providence.

Philip Temple was the first to break the silence.

"That was very close," he exclaimed, in a voice whose calmness Tracy admired even then. And he added, in a solicitous tone:

"I feared that you had received a shock, Mrs. Boynton. You were dreadfully white—and I guess I was too."

"She is peculiarly sensitive to a fright of this kind," Mr. Boynton gravely replied. His speech and expressions were as unlike the lightness, grace and frank sincerity of Temple's as could be imagined.

Which was the better man it would be hard to judge, even for a mutual friend. Yet they were in no way alike.

The spell was broken, and Mrs. Boynton's self-possession returned. Her escape seemed to lend her an increased sense of security.

"I am fated to be scared by lightning" she said, with a faint smile. And then, as though suddenly recollecting she added:

"I beg pardon, Chester. I will present to you an old acquaintance and friend, Mr. Temple—my husband, whom you so desired to meet, Philip."

The gentlemen shook hands. Philip's hand-clasp was warm and friendly; that of Mr. Boynton was more formal. Their glances met also, and what was to prove a fateful acquaintance began.

The rest of the distance to the house was soon accomplished, and when they reached their destination the storm had nearly ceased.

A little later the trio were seated upon the hotel ver-

anda, which went entirely around the building. There were other guests there also, but they were gathered in groups, and did not intrude upon each other.

"A charming place for the summer months, isn't it?" Philip Temple remarked. He sat facing Mrs. Boynton, and the latter watched the play of light and shadow upon his handsome features with curious interest.

"Rather pleasant," admitted Boynton, less enthusiastically.

"Chester never found any spot upon this earth quite charming," declared Tracy.

"Is that so?" and Temple laughed, adding: "How queer, when I'm charmed wherever I go! There's such an abundance of beauty everywhere; and I am perpetually impressed with the novelty of living. There's something new, pleasant or unpleasant, happens every day. I've encountered both to-day, though the unpleasant, coming in a flash of lightning, was rather trancient, I hope the pleasure will be more lasting."

He glanced toward Tracy as he spoke, and the bright smile which he saw there recalled with vividness the old days when he had lived, as it were, upon Tracy Sherman's approval.

"This is a pleasant place enough, to be sure," Boynton admitted, his gaze fixed upon the rugged face of the mountain.

"It is quiet, and gives one an opportunity to think. And there are queer people here at the hotel whom I like to study. Yonder comes one of them now—a regular budget of eccentricities."

"And as ugly as a bear, you might add," supplemented the young wife, with a pretty, deprecatory gesture.

The object of Boynton's remark was coming toward them, from a lonely seat upon the lawn, where he had been dozing under the full glare of the afternoon sun. He was a thin, pale man, with a monstrous black moustache and heavy brows that lent his countenance a fierce expression. He had a furtive way of looking at people

which was sufficient to make a nervous person afraid of him. He came directly to where they were sitting, and Boynton presented Philip Temple in a formal way.

The eccentric man was known simply as Mr. Brock.

"Cool after the shower—eh?" he observed, furtively glancing from the face of Mrs. Boynton to that of the young man.

"Cool, did you say?" Philip returned, in surprise It had seemed to him decidedly sultry with the glaring sunshine and humid atmosphere.

"Yes, cool," Mr. Brock insisted, knitting his heavy brows.

It seemed to iritate him to have his assertion questioned.

"Not quite so warm as before," Philip courteously admitted.

Mr. Brock, he noticed, wore rather heavy clothes, and he had a habit of shrugging his shoulders frequeutly, as though he was suffering from a chill.

"I didn't know as it had been too warm," he said, in his quick, impatient manner, adding: "It's curious that everybody complains of the heat the first comfortable day we have in summer. It's curious, too, that so many go to the mountains to keep cool. I go there to keep warm. If the sun would only shine all the time, and there was no shade, I should succeed pretty well. But it's chilly now—and damp!"

The eccentric man fixed his keen eyes upon the face of Mr. Temple as though he expected a contradiction. But none was forthcoming, although Philip could not repress a smile.

"I suppose you've come to remind me of our accustomed stroll, Mr. Brock?" Boynton questioned.

"Yes, of course," the other hastened to say, adding, "your friend won't mind, I'll warrant. Nor your wife, either. They can spare you and I, better'n not!"

This observation was suplemented by a low chuckle,

which was the nearest approach to a laugh ever indulged by Mr. Brock.

An indignant flush leaped into the cheeks of Mrs. Boynton, and a sharp retort trembled upon her lips. But the impulse was controled, partly because her resentment, at that moment was transferred from Mr. Brock to her husband.

"They will excuse us, to be sure," Boynton declared, rising to his feet and crossing the veranda.

Had he given his wife so much as a passing glance, the intense expression of her face would have detained him. But he did not. He knew that she disliked Brock, and so he thought it rather a kindness to her than otherwise to lead the crotchety individual away, humoring his whim at the same time.

And so they walked away together, quickly disappearing from view.

Philip Temple, keenly observant, saw the look upon the young wife's face. He had noticed other expressions also, during the brief time which he had passed with them, which filled his mind with vague, unwelcome conjectures.

It seemed to him that Chester Boynton and his young wife were not upon the best of terms with each other. There was certainly a marked contrast in their temperaments. Was it possible that Tracy was not quite happy?

Philip vanished the question the moment it flashed upon his brain. He had no right to ask it, even within himself. All married people have their little differences; otherwise their existence would be a paradise. Thus he reflected; and he again ventured to meet the gaze of Mrs. Boynton.

"I don't see how Chester can endure that man's society!" she exclaimed, with an involuntary shudder.

"Enjoys his oddities, I suppose," Philip returned.

"Partly that." She hesitated, gazing after the retreating figures, and then went on impetuously:

"He is studying his character, I expect—Chester

studies everybody, and everything. He studies me, and he will study you, and then he will analyze us, as though we were a doubtful drug and he a chemist. That Brock he considers as a type of character. To me he is a snake —always cold, and stealthy, and delighting to sun himself upon a rock at noonday. I'm afraid of him!"

Tracy Boynton's tones were very low; but the impetuousness of her utterance betrayed pentup emotions which she dared not wholly confers. It almost seemed to her companion that she was about to confide her disappointment to him—if she were disappointed. He experienced in that moment a wild wish that she would do so. It would be so pleasant to repay her confidence with chivalrous advice. For he would act a chivalrous part, and if aught were causing husband and wife to drift asunder, he would exercise all his influence to bring them together again. It did not even occur to Philip Temple that for him to act as a mediator between these two were perilous to them all.

"Your husband seems like a thoughtful man," Philip observed, after an embarrassing period of silence.

"He thinks too much upon great things," was the quick reply.

Tracy laughed nervously and added:

"Oh, he is a great way above me in thought and aspiration. It is a wonder that he can care for me—and yet he does!"

This last was added, as though to counteract any contrary impression which her words might have made.

"It can't be that he looks *down* upon you?" Philip questioned, with an indignant flash.

The laughing response to his earnestness brought a flush of embarrassment to his cheeks.

"Oh, no. We look up to each other!" was the reply.

From that their conversation drifted into lighter channels. Tracy could not help but realize that they had a great deal in common to talk about. She was surprised, and pleased, to find that he was cultivating an artistic

taste. She was doing the same. They entered upon a discussion of the modern landscape painters. Philip had met Thomas Hill, whose interpretations of wild western and mountain scenery are so famous.

"He is an eccentric but genial, whole-souled fellow," the young man declared, in a glow of enthusiasm. "I have his photograph over at the cottage. Didn't I tell you? I'm stopping with a rugged young farmer over yonder—not more than a mile, I think. And this reminds me—they'll be waiting supper for me."

Philip sprang to his feet, glancing at his watch. Two hours had passed; the sun had disappeared behind the trees; a silvery crescent was brightening through the somber purple of the western sky.

They were alone upon the veranda; they had not noticed that the other guests had entered the house.

CHAPTER III.

HIS ECCENTRIC FRIEND.

"Yes, it *is* haunted, this quiet scene,
Fair as it looks, and all softly green.
—*Mrs. Hemans.*

Mrs. Boynton rose also, a little startled to find that they were entirely alone.

"They must have all stolen away upon tip-toe, or we should have heard them," she said, with a light laugh.

She glanced upward toward the towering face of the mountain, with its alternating patches of light and shadow. Then her gaze was turned upon the path which her husband and his strange companion had taken.

"Mr. Boynton must find the society of his eccentric friend extremely fascinating," Temple remarked, noting the slight shadow of displeasure which had suddenly fallen upon her face.

"I wish he would return," she replied.

"Are they accustomed to indulging in such protracted strolls?"

"They have been away together several times. They have never remained so long as this, however. It is very strange that Chester can find the society of that cold, snaky Mr. Brock so agreeable. I wish he would go away. I feel a premonition sometimes that he is to prove my evil genious. He gives me the shivers every time I look at him. Indeed, I can tell when he is near, although I do not see him—he taints the very air!"

Philip moved toward the steps leading to the path. At the rail he paused and looked back.

"Good night," he said.

Tracy advanced quickly and gave him her hand.

"It is n't good by?" she questioned.

"I hope not. I may remain at the cottage for a month—perhaps not so long. I shall see you often while I stay. I hope to grow better acquainted with Mr. Boynton. But he studies everybody so closely, according to you, that I shall be a trifle afraid of him."

"He won't harm you—he will like you, I know," she replied, somewhat eagerly, as though she were voicing a wish rather than a prediction.

"We shall become fast friends, without doubt." In the interval of silence that ensued a whippoorwill, which had alighted upon a rock close by, burst forth in its clear, prophetic song.

The weird melody added to the witchery of the hour and scene, and Philip Temple lingered, listening, absorbed in a sense of dreamy contentment, forgetful alike of present and future.

The cessation of the song broke the spell.

"It is growing cool and damp," he quickly exclaimed, in sudden solicitude, for his companion shivered at the moment.

"I have been thoughtless in keeping you here so long. I'll not detain you another moment."

He ran down the steps and hastened briskly away. At

a turn of the path he glanced backward. The moon was obscured for the moment by a small cloud, and the hotel looked like a huge, shapeless monster in the gloom. It seemed to him that Tracy Boynton was standing where he had left her.

Was she looking after him? No, it was more likely that she was looking for the return of her husband.

Philip Temple faced resolutely about and walked rapidly along the lonely path, striving to break the spell which was upon him by whistling a hornpipe.

The path led in a zigzag course along the lower slopes of the mountain's base. There were trees upon either side; there were also occasional rocks, hugh and rugged. Beyond one of these Philip caught the glimmer of a light, and instantly he halted, surprised and wondering at the discovery.

The light twinkled through the swaying twigs of a clump of small birches which grew close to the rock.

Philip hesitated a moment, and then started toward the light. The way was rough, and almost impassable with dense undergrowth and wild clamatis. There were raspberry briers growing thickly from rocky clefts, and these clung tenaciously to the young man's garments. Still the light, and his own curiosity, beckoned him on, and he pushed forward persistently. He succeeded in getting through the thickest of the shrubbery, and looked again for the light.

But it had disappeared.

"A queer go, anyhow!" he impatiently exclaimed, irritated to find that his persistence had been in vain.

He halted and glanced about him. It was a lovely scene. There were trees, rocks and undergrowth upon every side. In the gloom every object appeared vague in outline, unreal in substance.

"Halloa!" he shouted—or rather uttered, for the call could not have been heard a dozen rods away.

There was no response, a soft breeze rustled the shrubbery in a stealthy way. The distant cry of a whippoor-

will came to his ears, and he wondered if it was the same to which he and Mrs. Boynton had listened a short time before.

"Bah!—why do I loiter here?" he muttered, interrupting his own fancies.

He hastened to work his way back to the path. When he had reached the latter he glanced back, and with a thrill, saw again that twinkling light which he had attempted to reach!

It was in the same spot as when it first caught his eye. It seemed as though he had to pass through the intervening bushes and shrubbery to reach it.

"I believed this spot is bewitched!" he exclaimed. For an instant his nerves thrilled with the conviction that he had chanced upon one of those weird occurrences of which superstitious humanity is forever citing instances, while they pretend a disbelief in the supernatural.

Philip Temple hesitated between the impulse to investigate the curious incident, and the wish to reach his destination.

"Some one is encamping upon the mountain-side, and is out with a lantern," he said to himself. Still the light twinkled before his vision in a tantalizing way, and half against his inclination he found himself once more pushing his way through the bushes and vines. He reached the opening, and again looked for the light. With the same result as before!—for it had disappeared. Then he began a careful exploration of the vicinity. He peered through thickets, behind rocks. He stepped into unseen pitfalls, and at last fell upon rocks and was nearly stunned.

Regaining his feet, he returned to the path warm, excited, half-angry with himself, and the tantilizing mystery. And there, to add to his irritation he saw again that twinkling light, in the same spot, and as bright as at first.

"I think my brain is a little out of trim," he declared,

impatiently turning his back upon the glimmering mystery.

He quickly left the spot behind, and five minutes later came in sight of a light which did not vanish nor retreat as he approached.

The cottage was small, plain, yet picturesque, surrounded as it was by the rugged scenery of the mountain.

In the doorway a short, stout man was standing, smoking a pipe. He stepped outside to make way for his guest as the latter came up.

"Guess you've lost your supper, Mr. Temple," said the young farmer, taking the pipe from his lips and holding it in a half deferential way.

"Have I? I'm glad of it, on the whole—I wasn't hungry," Temple returned.

"I guess Jenny 'll fix up somethin' for you, if you'll go in. We waited a spell, and then I told her we might as well eat, 'cause you'd come when you got ready. And so we had our supper." The man drew two or three whiffs at his pipe, and then asked:

"Get ketched in the shower, did ye?"

"Yes—but I was under a rock through the worst of it, and didn't get very wet," Philip explained.

There was a brief interval of silence. Philip Temple was haunted by the mysterious occurrence which he had so fruitlessly tried to investigate. "I'd like to ask you a question, Mr. Webb," he abruptly declared.

The young farmer looked curiously at the speaker from under his brows, again holding his pipe betwixt his fingers.

"What about?" he questioned.

"Another singular adventure which I had to-night. I came from the summer hotel about a mile from here. There's a path all the way and there are plenty of rocks and bushes."

"I've been over the path times enough to know all 'bout it," Webb interpolated as the other paused.

Philip went on to detail his adventure. The young

farmer listened without comment, puffing vigorously at his pipe the while.

"What do you think of it?" Temple asked, curiously impressed by the other's silence.

"Just what I expected—I've seen it myself!" returned Webb, shrugging his broad sholders. His tone was a trifle awed, and he went on smoking, as though to dispel the haunting memory of a weird experience.

CHAPTER IV.

TELL ME! SHE CRIED.

"More strange than true. I never may believe
These antic fables nor these fairy toys."

Midsummer Night's Dream.

Philip Temple was not deceived in the impression that Mrs. Boynton lingered upon the hotel veranda after he had gone.

She leaned upon the railing and watched him out of sight. Nor did she go in when he had disappeared, although the air had grown decidedly chilly, and she wore no wrap.

Her reflections became retrospective, and she thought of Philip Temple as she had known him five years before. He had changed but little. She remembered that at the time of her rejection of his suit he had accepted her decision as conditional only.

"I think I have spoken too hastily," he had said, in a kindly way which had done more to increase her regard for him than all his attentions before.

"Unless your love is bestowed elsewhere," he went on, "it is not necessary that a final answer be given now. There is time enough, and I can wait. We will continue as friends; and if it ever comes to pass that your life seems incomplete unlinked with mine, then your present answer will be the same as unspoken. I have your hap-

piness at heart, Tracy, even more than my own, although to give you up wholly would be the deepest disappointment I can ever know!"

Those were Philip Temple's words, and they made a strong impression on Tracy Sherman's mind. In a vague sort of way she had looked forward to a time when, in his words, "her life would seem incomplete unlinked with his." But soon after they were separated; and embryo love is too often killed by the frosts of separation. During the next two years a fatality, or chance, kept them apart. Tracy went abroad with her parents; and as travelers meet in foreign lands, she met Chester Boynton. They became companions, friends, were engaged, and were married before returning to American shores.

Leaning over the rail of the hotel veranda, with the influence of Philip Temple's presence fresh upon her, Mrs. Boynton was impressed for the first time with a conviction that her marriage without a formal renunciation of Philip's regards had not been quite fair toward him. It almost seemed as though she owed him a plea for pardon even now—and yet, she realized the impropriety of offering one. Even an allusion to their former relations were wrong—perilous.

She looked out upon the patches of light and shadow with a sudden sense of possible danger. Of what had she been thinking? Had she unconsciously compared the mental characteristics of her husband with those of Philip Temple? And had the former suffered by the comparison?

A step sounded upon the veranda, and Mrs. Boynton started, uttered a low cry. She saw a tall figure advancing toward her, and she trembled as with sudden fright.

"You will take cold here, Tracy. Go in at once," said Chester Boynton as he confronted her. His tone was stern, his command almost arbitrary.

At the same time, as she looked up into his face, she was struck by its expression. She had never seen him look like that before. He was pale; his lips were drawn;

a new light blazed in his eyes. She could perceive all this even in the semi-gloom, and she was impressed with nameless apprehension.

"What has happened, Chester?" she breathlessly exclaimed, laying a hand upon his arm.

"Nothing—why do you ask?" he returned.

In his effort to suppress the evidence of his agitation his voice sounded husky. The vague alarm of his wife was intensified.

"Tell me!" she cried. And then, as though the utterance of the name was repulsive to her, she added:

"When did you come back? And where is—is Brock?"

"He returned before sunset; I have but just come," was the hasty reply.

"Have you been to supper?" he added, impatiently.

"Why don't you tell me? and has Mr. Temple gone?"

"He went a few minutes ago. We waited for you, Chester. I began to be alarmed at your absence," she explained.

"You need never have fears for me because I am out of your sight for an hour or two. I suppose you were afraid Mr. Brock had eaten me alive. I tell you, Tracy, you would not dispise that man if you knew him. He is a wonderful man. He has been the victim of great misfortunes; yet, in spite of his cold exterior, he has a warm heart."

The young wife cast a hasty glance out among the shadows; a shiver convulsed her form.

"I dare say yours is a true estimate of him, Chester," she said. "Yet to me his face, his motions, his voice, every word he utters is strongly, painfully repellant. He seems to me like a serpent. And I fear that you will fall under the spell of his fatal fascinations!"

"Nonsense, Tracy!"

The impatience of Mr. Boynton's tone amounted almost to anger.

"You must not yield to such silly fancies," he con-

tinued. "You do him injustice; you doubt my judgment; you indulge a romantic folly. Ours is real life, not romance. We shall be happy and unhappy, like other people. But it is not in the power of any 'human serpent' to cast an evil spell upon us. These are not the days of witchcraft, and you must not allow such ideas to gain possession of your mind. It isn't sensible. They will do you harm."

Boynton, while speaking, had led her into the house. Under the gaslight the appearance of his agitation was not so marked—else it had subsided. They ate supper together in silence. Then he went to regale himself with a cigar, leaving Tracy with the other ladies upon the front veranda. Here all was life and brightness. The flickering lights, the hum of voices, in a measure dispelled the sense of depression which had possessed the mind of Mrs. Boynton. From within floated the notes of a lively air which someone was evoking from the rich-toned piano.

Tracy, standing a little apart, felt two soft, warm hands upon her cheeks, and a silvery, half-childish voice sounded in her ears.

"I've found you now, and I'll keep you, too," said the voice.

"You shall keep me until bedtime, Lou—I'll promise not to run away from you," Tracy returned, a ring of unfeigned pleasure in her tones.

And she impulsively kissed the pretty, dimpled cheeks so near her own.

For Lou Wentworth, with her blue, laughing eyes, her innocent, vivacious ways, was the only guest at the hotel for whose exclusive companionship the young wife of Chester Boynton really cared.

The emanations of joyousness which seemed ever to surround this petite being was to Tracy a sort of antidote for the noisome, chilling presence of Mr. Brock.

"I was afraid that handsome stranger had carried you

away from us," exclaimed the girl, linking her arm within that of her companion.

"So you were watching us, you sly rogue?" Mrs. Boynton questioned. She began to experience a strange elation of spirits, in marked contrast with the recent vague forebodings which she had entertained.

"I watched *him*—not you," Miss Wentworth replied, as they paused in their walk at a point remote from the other guests.

"He is a handsome fellow, isn't he? Almost as princely looking as my—as Roy Blanchard!"

Even the shadow in which they were standing did not hide the deepening pink upon the shy face of the speaker.

"*Your* Roy, Lou? Has he really——"

Lou's soft hand stopped Tracy's utterances just there.

"Not yet—it isn't sure!" the girl returned, in a quick, breathless way. Her bright face had taken on a serious, even anxious expression, and she looked straight into the eyes of her companion, as she went on:

"We were together a long while to-day, and he was as kind as—as I could wish. But we're not engaged. He has said nothing about that; nothing direct and plain, I mean. And to-night he is with Alma Buston, I think. So I feel sure and happy one moment, and in doubt and misery the next!" The girl's soft tones faltered; tears dimmed the azure of her eyes.

"My darling! it is cruel for you to be in such painful doubt," Mrs. Boynton returned, tenderly kissing the face which but a moment before was dimpled with smiles.

"If there was only some way to find out so that all your doubts might be dispelled," Tracy went on, her woman's heart full of sympaty for the gentle, loving being by her side.

"If I only could," Lou echoed. "If you were only a sorceress, and could read my destiny in a tea-cup, or in the lines of my hand. Do you really believe there is *anything* in fortune-telling, Mrs. Boynton? Do you be-

lieve all the stories of divination coming true, which we hear, are false? Aren't they *ever* true?"

The blue eyes were opened wide with earnestness as she eagerly asked these questions, upon which many a maiden in love ponders in vain.

"They may come true sometimes—by chance," was the slow response.

"I suppose it is all very silly. And yet I would like to try just one thing, just for sport. No one but you is to know of it. And no harm will be done—only a little fun. Will you?"

The childish eagerness of the girl caused Mrs. Boynton to laugh softly.

"What do you wish me to do? Turn astrologer and read your horoscope?" she asked.

"No—something easier than that. That has to be done at the moment of one's birth, I believe, so it is too late to foretell my history in that way."

She spoke with unrelaxed seriousness. There was an interval of silence, in which the twain gazed forth upon the moonlit landscape, with the lengthening shadows creeping up the valley.

"There is a magic spring yonder, just beyond that big rock which looks like a crouching elephant," Lou declared, lowering her voice to a whisper, and indicating the spot with one outstretched hand.

"I have heard it spoken of," replied her companion, adding with a smile:

"And you wish to go thither and try your fate by bending over the spring to drink, in the hope of seeing the face of Roy Blanchard mirrored there, as though he were looking over your shoulder! you silly, loving child!"

"What will be the harm? There is no danger, it is so near the house. And beside, you will be near me, only you must stand upon this side of the rock. Of course I shall see nothing only my own face, and that will look so foolish that I shall never wish to try my fate in that way

again. Will you go with me? now, before the moon goes down?"

"Yes, I'll humor you. It is a simpler spell than that which was required to conjure the White Lady of Avenel before the vision of Halbert Glendinning, in Scott's novel of 'The Monestery.' Come, before we are observed."

They descended the steps nearest them, and hastened toward the rock which Lou had designated.

The distance was so short that, when they stood beside the huge rock, they could hear the voices and piano at the hotel.

Yet Lou clung to the hand of her companion, pale and trembling.

"I'm afraid to try it, now," she exclaimed, in a whisper.

"I expected you would be," Tracy returned. Although naturally romantic and imaginative herself, Mrs. Boynton was not prone to indulge groundless fears.

"I wish you would try first, Mrs. Boynton," said her companion.

"I? You forget that I have a husband already."

"That doesn't matter—it's only a foolish trick, you know, and it would be nice if you *should* see the face of Mr. Boynton mirrored in the spring. *Do* try, and then I won't be afraid. I will stand here, where I can almost see you."

Tracy hesitated only in her reluctance to indulge in such folly. At twenty-four, and with a husband, it all seemed very ridiculous. Yet she could not resist the earnest, childish pleading of her young friend.

"I will drink from the spring—to please you. But if Chester were really there to look over my shoulder he would scold me roundly. He despises such folly."

She unclasped the clinging fingers of Lou, and went boldly around the rock.

The girl stood, breathless, half-expectant. The experiment seemed fraught with fateful significance to her impressionable nature.

Half-credulous though she was, however, she was thrilled with fear when Tracy Boynton darted around the rock with a low, horrified cry, and sank at her feet in a swoon!

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.

"'Tis night when meditation bids us feel
We once have loved, though love is at an end."
—*Childe Harold.*

"You've seen the light, as I've described, did you say?" Philip Temple asked, as the young farmer smoked on in silence.

"Yes. Two or three times. Tother night was the last."

Jason Webb proceeded to knock the ashes from his pipe, and then thrust the latter into the pocket of his blouse.

He then slowly faced his guest, and Temple perceived that his countehance wore a look of irritation.

"I hate a mystery worse'n pizen!" he exclaimed, with a vehement shake of the head.

"So you count that light which I saw to-night as a mystery, do you?" Temple questioned, his interest growing keen.

"Course it is. Anything that nobody can explain is mysterious, isn't it? And what's mysterious is a mystery, according to my reckoning. You tried to solve it it to-night, didn't you?"

"I made a slight effort, yes. But being unaccustomed to the lay of the land I found I was in danger of breaking my neck, and so gave it up. I dare say I would have solved the puzzle if I'd persisted."

"Mebbe you would—I won't say. But you didn't persist quite long enough, same as I didn't, and same as more'n a dozen smart chaps hasn't. Some of 'em smart as you or I, Mr. Temple."

Webb's good-natured laugh took the possible sting from his sarcasm. It was plain that he was a clear-headed fellow with plenty of practical common-sense. Nor was he likely to become frightened at his own shadow.

"So I've struck upon one of the numerous ghost-episodes which are floating about in all rural districts," said Temple, half-musingly.

"Call it what you're mind ter, it's curi's, and has puzzled a good many people."

"When was the phenomenon first noticed?" Philip asked.

"Most two years ago. Jenney, my wife, seen it first, as she was comin' home from Jim Rice's one dark evenin'. Jim lives a mile or so below here, and there's a path branches off'n this one leading straight there. Jenny seen the light, and s'posed 'twas me come to meet her with a lantern. She spoke my name, and not getting any answer, took a notion to investigate. She's a spunky woman, if I do say it, and not scare't at her own shadow. But when the light vanished and then appeared ag'in, as you seen it to-night, she run home lively."

"And did you go back to solve the mystery that night?" Philip pursued, strangely interested in the simple, yet vivid narrative of Jason Webb.

"No. I thought like 'nough somebody did it for a trick to frighten her.

"And who saw the mysterious light next?"

"Jim Rice—and he stands to it that somebody smashed his lantern for him when he tried to investigate. But I guess he got scare't and broke it agin' a tree. Anyhow, the lantern was broke to flinders, for I see it the next morning."

"And were you the next one to encounter the puzzle?"

"Yes. But I didn't have no lantern, and you know it's a pokerish place to get 'round in in the dark. I was served 'bout the same way as you was to-night.

"I suppose you have examined the spot in the day time?"

"Two or three times."

"And with what result?"

"Didn't find anything. Always so, you know, the same as 'tis when you explore a haunted house in day time. Nothing ever happens that isn't natural as can be by daylight, and the very devil will be to pay after sundown. I've poked into such things considerable at one time and another. Good many folks get scare't at what could be explained easy enough if they kept cool. Still things do happen that nobody finds out what causes 'em, though nobody ever believes it till they've seen the manifestations themselves."

"I suppose you have seen enough to convince you that there are really ghosts and haunted houses?"

Jason Webb laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"No, I don't believe in 'em," he declared, decisively.

"And yet," he added, "I know that there's things that I can't see through, and that you can't, and that nobody can till they try science on the surface of things, and stop digging so deep after mysteries. People dig half through the earth to find what lays right under the surface, so to speak. It's always been the way. If I knew as much about science as you educated fellows do, I would go up and solve that mystery within twenty-four hours."

It was Philip's turn to laugh—and yet he perceived the germs of good sense in the young farmer's homely remark.

"I see you are determined to lay the task of solving this weird mystery upon my shoulders, and when I fail, as I probably shall, you'll laugh at me," said Philip.

"I guess you won't fail if you really try. But you wont' try. You had rather laugh at the whole affair; call it a freak of your imagination or something of that sort," Webb seriously returned.

"It was not my imagination, I'm sure of that." Temple said this decisively, knitting his brows.

Webb made no response, and the guest fell into a revery. The moon had disappeared beyond the trees, and only the column of light shining forth from the open doorway of the cottage relieved the darkness outside. Even this was presently darkened by a shadow human in contour. Turning, Temple saw that Jenny, the pretty wife of the young farmer, had come out upon the step.

"I knew you had come, Mr. Temple," she said, in a voice which was remarkably sweet and mellow. "I heard you talking with Jason, and have improved the time to make seme fresh toast for you. Please don't let it get cold."

"You're very kind—more so than I deserve, Mrs. Webb."

The unaffected friendliness of this couple strongly impressed the young man, who was accustomed to the inhospitableness of city boarding places. And he went in and did justice to the young housewife's cookery, although it had not occurred to him before that he was hungry. A little later he retired to his room, which was the neatest and most airy the cottage contained. Seating himself by an open window, he lit a cigar, and sent blue rings of fragrant smoke floating upward to the ceiling

He looked out of the window upon the somber landscape. He wondered if the summer hotel, where the Boyntons were stopping, was located in the hollow beyond the tall, blasted pine which he could see outlined against the gray sky. He pictured to himself the face and form of Tracy Boynton as she had appeared leaning over the railing, as he had left her. He recalled the touch of her hand, the half-eager tone of voice as she had said, "It is n't good by?" as he was about to go.

"Can she have forgotten what I said to her five years ago?" he asked himself. The question brought back the old pain, which had harassed him so long and hopelessly in the months and years which were past.

"She cannot have forgotten," he went on, uttering the

words half-aloud, and bending toward the window until the cool, damp air swept his brow. "Women never forget such things, I believe. I had thought that she would yet alter her decision in the course of time. I even fancied that the transformation had begun before we parted, and —I believe so yet, and it was by a perverse freak of fate that we were separated. Why was it so? Was it better for her?—or for me? What does *she* think of it now? I dare not think of it—I must not! She has made her choice, and no doubt it is a good one—for him!"

Philip Temple flung away his cigar and walked impetuously across the room.

Returning he paused before the window, his lips compressed, his face startlingly pale.

But the sudden burst of passion, the sweep of painful memories, of unanswered hopes, quickly passed.

"This will not do," he exclaimed, resolutely. His manner grew calm under control, and he added, with a smile: "The ordeal of a first meeting after our long separation, and the intervening changes, could not have failed to be a painful one to me, and embarrassing to her. The renewal of our friendships under the new conditions will do more than aught else to cure me of what is now but folly. She shall realize now, if never before, that I possess manhood and the power of self-control. If it were otherwise I should lose her respect. I have a right to her friendly regard, and I will retain it, for it is too sweet a possession to forfeit!"

Philip smoked another cigar, scanned the newspaper which he found upon his table awaiting perusal, and then went to bed.

He did not lie awake; he was too physically weary for that. But his dreams abounded in vagaries. He pursued illusive lights, falling over rocks and finding himself again and again upon the brink of dark abysses. Once he found himself bending over a spring of water and saw the face of Tracy Boynton reflected in its limpid depths. In a thrill of ecstacy he bent to kiss the mir-

rored face; but the contact of his own with the cool water awakened him with a start. His face was really cold and wet. It was raining outside, and a strong wind sent the drops in through the open window upon the bed, and his upturned face.

CHAPTER VI.

ARE YOU ILL, TRACY?

"Let sage or cynic prattle as he will,
These hours, and only these, redeem life's years of ill."
—*Childe Harold.*

Lou Wentworth, in an agony of terror and distress, bent over the unconscious figure of her companion. At the same time she heard a footstep, and turning with added fear, saw Chester Boynton coming toward them.

"What is the meaning of this? What has happened?" he demanded sternly, bending over his wife. It might have been his voice, or the dash of cool drops from the overhanging foliage which was swayed by a passing breeze, that recalled her to consciousness, for her eyes opened at the instant, and she looked shrinkingly up into his face.

With his help she rose to a sitting posture, and leaned against him as he crouched at her side.

"Are you ill, Tracy? Or frightened?" he questioned, more gently than before.

"Both, I think," she answered with a shiver. She ent an appealing glance toward Lou as she spoke—a glance that said plainly: "I will explain to him; you need not."

Aloud she added:

"I did not quite swoon. But I was too weak and faint to stand, or speak. I never felt like that before."

Lou turned reluctantly away, her own heart still fluttering with excitement.

"What—or whom—did she see at the Magic Spring?" the girl asked herself as she hurried through the wet

grass toward the house. In her preoccupation she did not see the person coming toward her. They did not see each other, in fact, until there was a mild collision.

"Oh!" she screamed, starting back. Then she recognized the smiling, handsome face of Roy Blanchard, and her terror was changed into shy delight.

"Why don't you run away, as you started to do?" he questioned, with an assumption of gravity.

"I will, if you wish it!" and she turned to flee. But he caught her in a firm, yet gentle grasp.

"Please don't, unless *you* wish," he implored. He drew her hand within his arm, and led her past the house, and out upon the zigzag road. "I have been looking for you," he went on, his tones falling like richest melody upon her ears.

"Looking for me—for how long?" she asked.

"All the evening; but you have managed to keep out of my sight until this moment, and you would have run away from me now."

She sent a quick resentful glance up into his face.

"Is it rude to dispute such a remark as yours?" she flashed back.

"Yes, very rude, for it is the truth," he returned in an earnest tone. Was it real? She could not see his face distinctly enough to be certain whether he were smiling or grave.

"It requiredtwo of you to search for me," she said, her voice very low, to hide its unsteadiness perhaps.

"Yes, Alma Burton kindly volunteered to aid me in my quest. She fancied that you and Mrs. Boynton had strayed away together. Do you know, I sometimes fancy that you prefer the society of that lady to mine?"

Lou Wentworth perceived that he was indulging his old *penchant* for tantilizing, and was quickly on her guard.

"For once your fancy impressed you aright," she demurely said.

"Really, Lou?" There was more earnestness in his tones then than he had before evinced.

"We are both serious, aren't we? I certainly thought we were," she returned.

They walked on in silence, and presently came to the bridge in the hollow over the deep, narrow stream, which swept silently through the valley. They paused here, and leaned over the rail to look at the black, eddying current. Its stealthy murmur as it fretted the shelving banks came up to them out of the silence and gloom.

"What a romantic place for committing suicide," Roy gravely observed.

"It would be a good place for you to try it. I know of no better—it is especially suited to the sort of frenzy which would actuate the attempt in one of your temperament."

He looked at her keenly, but it was too dark to see more than the soft outlines of her face. The white wrap which she wore was pinned close at her throat.

"Why is this so especially suited for me?" he asked, with more eagerness than the lightness of the *badinage* seemed to warrant.

"Because the current is so strong at this point that you could not sink; and a few yards below the stream widens, and is scarce a foot in depth, it is said. So you wouldn't drown, and the coldness of the water would subdue your frenzy."

He laughed musically, admiring her more than ever before. Perhaps, until now, he had supposed her to be more loving than clever.

"I might hang a mill-stone to my neck before jumping in," he suggested.

"You may do that without intending to drown yourself. A great many do," she returned.

"It is unfair to make a figurative retort to a literal proposal."

"It is as fair as for one to expect a literal answer to a figurative proposal—isn't it? I may be wrong."

"Yes, you are wrong. Besides, I have not indulged in metaphor. I am in a serious mood to-night, more serious than you dream."

"I'm sorry for you, then."

"Why?"

"Because the opposite is the case with me."

"Then, if I should make a serious, solemn proposal of any sort—one affecting your happiness and mine for a lifetime, how should you answer me?" Again his tone was eager.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," she replied.

"Why not?"

"Because I should make a figurative response."

"If it were an assent I should accept it even in that guise."

"It would not be an assent."

"You are unmerciful!" he exclaimed, with assumed bitterness.

"I show more mercy than you comprehend. I am wiser than you concerning the aims of your life, and in withholding the consummation of your hopes I should be exercising the highest quality of mercy."

"Toward you or me, do you mean?"

"Both."

He was silent a moment. He reached upward and plucked a handful of leaves from an overhanging beech and cast them upon the swift moving stream.

"You do not yet know that I entertain hopes which you have the power of blighting," he said at length.

"I doubt if you know yourself," she retorted, a fine scorn in her tone.

"Don't say that, Lou!" he cried, this time with an eagerness which was unfeigned. And he continued with an impetuousness which did not permit of interruption:

"You think I live upon the surface of everything; that no wishes nor aspirations reach my inner nature. Perhaps you have reasons for estimating my character thus; but I will prove to you that you are wrong. I will cast

my fate upon your hands; I will show you that I have hopes, and you shall have the power and opportunity for deciding them now!"

He paused; and in that pause she spoke, with an odd commingling of lightness and resoluteness.

"I told you how I should treat anything of a serious character from your lips tonight. I shall make a figurative response, and it will be a negative at that. So do not hazard your fate at such an unauspicious time. It might cost you your night's repose, and it is well to keep your sleep unbroken as long as you may. 'Where ignorance is bliss,' you know."

He was silent again, possibly at a loss how to treat her remark.

"And if I wait until a more auspicious time?" he questioned, at length.

"Do not attempt to fathom what the future may hold in store for you." And after a moment she added:

"Go up to the Magic Spring and see what is mirrored there—though perhaps you have tried that test already. For—ha! you betray guilt."

Roy Blanchard's laugh was not quite so light as it usually was, and he vouchsafed no reply to the charge.

It was her turn to be eager.

"Own up the truth," she said, in a tone of assumed badinage; "you drank from the Magic Spring. Do not deny it."

"I haven't denied it," he returned.

"And you saw a face mirrored there?"

"Yes."

"Besides your own?" her voice low with suppressed avidity for his response.

"Besides my own," he declared.

"The face of Alma Burton, or—" she paused, for him to reply.

"No, not hers."

"It doesn't matter," with assumed indifference. Then, to repay him for tantalizing her, she added:

"I should never have thought you capable of such folly. It might do for a school-girl, but in you—!"

"To what folly do you refer, Miss Wentworth?" he asked, with assumed ignorance of her meaning.

"The trying of such a silly test—a fortune-telling trick!"

"I tried no trick—at least, none of the sort to which you refer."

"But you drank from the magic spring?"

"Why shouldn't I, if I was thirsty? It is remarkably good water. But I drank at noonday, and the spell is said to work only in the night-time.

"But you said you saw a face reflected—one beside your own!"

"Which was true. It was the face of a very pretty canine, however, which took a fancy to drink when I did. Whose dog it was—"

She interrupted him by freeing her arm, and running briskly up the road toward the house.

He quickly came up with her, eagerly exclaiming:

"Forgive me, Lou!"

"There's nothing to forgive," she said, with a reassuring laugh. But she hurried on, and in a moment they came in sight of the hotel.

At the same time it began to rain; and Lou Wentworth again joined the guests; and later retired to sleep, and dream of her hopes and doubts.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WIFE'S SUGGESTION.

"Lovers, and madmen, have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends."
Midsummer Night's Dream.

The next day dawned with overcast sky and a cold, drizzling rain.

Cheerful fires were kindled in the halls and public

rooms of the hotel, and the only consolation for the guests, shut in for the day, was in the charm of the glowing coals and dancing flames, which, however, sent out almost too much warmth for perfect comfort.

Probably the fires fully compensated for the loss of the sunshine to only one inmate of the house. Mr. Brock, with his black coat buttoned to his chin, occupied himself by going from one fire-place to another, pausing for a few moments before each to bathe his white, skinny hands in the warmth. He was freshly shaved, and his cheeks and chin shone as though they had been polished. This skinniness of the cuticle upon Mr. Brock's hands as well as his face, was a peculiarity which no one could fail to notice.

Mrs. Boynton kept to her apartments until afternoon. The morning found her unusually pale, for the night had not been a reposeful one to her. Her husband was irritated by the prospect of a dull day, for he, with several others, had arranged for a fishing excursion.

"We might spend this day together, Chester," his wife suggested. She stood at her mirror, adjusting the lace at her white throat. To say that Tracy Boynton was pretty is not doing her justice. Her loveliness was of a rare, classical type, such as an artist would choose for an ideal portrait. It is hard to describe such beauty as hers; it must be seen to be admired, and it is seldom seen.

"So we might," he replied, with a faint smile. After a moment he added:

"But I think it would be rather better taste to mingle with the other guests. We don't wish them to think us—" he paused, and she quickly asked:

"Think us—what?"

"Spooney—like a pair of turtle-doves."

She made no response, but a dash of pink came into her cheeks and there remained, as though she had applied *rouge*. He did not see it, however, because he did not look at her.

"Don't you think so?" he asked, after a rather protracted interval of silence.

"Oh, yes, of course. It would look better for me to stay with Lou Wentworth, or Miss Burton, while you might sit by Mr. Brock and help him to keep warm. I don't see how he will survive the day unless he can sun himself upon a rock."

The scorn in her tones was so fine that it was almost lost upon the hearer. He took it as a sort of pleasantry; he did not dream that her words were intended to convey keen reproach.

"I hadn't thought of Brock to-day—I haven't seen him, in fact," Chester remarked in a careless tone.

"I'm afraid," he continued, "that the poor fellow has frozen—that his blood is congealed in his veins. I must look him up. But for me he would have a dull time of it here, I declare."

Mr. Boynton rose, yawned, went to the mirror and adjusted his tie, and then went from the room. At the door he paused and looked back. Tracy had seated herself by a window, and was reading—or seeming to do so.

"Shall I send Miss Wentworth up to see you?" Chester asked.

"No."

"Perhaps Mr. Temple will come over by and by."

"I hope so. I truly hope he will."

She threw more eagerness into her tones as she said this than she really felt. But this, too, was lost upon her husband, who had turned away to greet some one passing along the corridor. The next moment he was descending the stairs.

It was not until then that Tracy covered her face and gave way to a paroxysm of emotion.

For an hour she sat thus; but her fit of weeping was of only a few moments duration. Her thoughts reverted to the occurrences of the previous evening—it was the first time she had had for thinking them alone. Her indulgence of Lou Wentworth's whim at the Magic Springs,

and its strange consequences, had been only partially dissolved to her husband.

She had refrained from telling him all, not from a wish to deceive him, but because she shrank with the keen ridicule which she was sure it would receive at his hands.

She told him only that Lou had requested her to go thither, and that she had complied. That she was nervous at the time, and a foolish cause frightened her. He was satisfied with her explanation; he would doubless have been satisfied if she had given him less.

"You and Miss Wentworth have been probably indulging in romantic absurdities, like a couple of school girls," he had said, in mild reproach.

"It was so strange—so strange!" the young wife kept repeating to herself now, as she recalled the event.

"Could it have been an hallucination? A freak of my own imagination, wrought upon by the time and place? What would Lou say, if she knew? and Philip? Chester would only laugh at me, or declare that I had drank too strong tea of late. And yet how plain it was—I can see it now, so vivid is the impression upon my mind."

Tracy rose at length and bathed her face in cool water. Then she went down. The first face she saw was Lou Wentworth's, and in a moment they were together, ensconced cosily in a deep window by themselves.

"Tell me about it, won't you?" Lou eagerly questioned. For I know you saw something. You wouldn't have swooned at nothing."

"It was very dark by the spring," Tracy replied, speaking slowly, undecided whether to make a confidante of her friend.

"And you were afraid? But something must have frightened you!—something weird and dreadful!"

Lou crossed her white arms upon her bosom in an unstudied, yet tragic attitude, and the big blue eyes, and red, parted lips all expressed a degree of expectancy which it would be cruel to disappoint.

"It was nothing very dreadful, if I saw anything,"

Mrs. Boynton replied. Yet rifts of white crossed her cheeks as she spoke.

"You were terribly startled, I'm sure. And you nearly frightened *me* out of my wits. If Mr. Boynton hadn't appeared just then I believe *I* should have swooned, too."

"My poor child." Tracy gently stroked the soft cheek so near her own.

"Perhaps it was he who frightened you—Mr. Boynton, I mean," Lou exclaimed.

"No, it was not my husband. It was no one. Yet I *thought I saw a face!*"

The confession was uttered scarce above a whisper.

"In the spring?" the girl breathlessly asked, impulsively catching the speaker's hands between both her own.

"Yes, mirrored beside my own. It was only a glimpse, of course, for I screamed and started back upon the instant. Yet it was distinct—yes, very distinct!"

Mrs. Boynton shuddered at the recollection, even though it was broad daylight then, and the murmur of voices filled the room.

Lou did not question her further just then. They sat for some time in silence, watching the dreary, dripping rain outside. Then the girl told of her brief stroll with Roy Blanchard, and all that passed between them. Then, somewhat later, she abruptly said:

"One thing you did not tell me, Tracy."

"What is it?"

"Whose face you saw reflected in the magic spring."

"It was only an illusion."

"But it resembled some one, of course."

"Yes, it did—the face of one who was once a dear friend—almost a brother." Mrs. Boynton paused, and then added: "Don't ask me his name, dear. And we won't think any more about it."

"What if I had gone to the spring, as I intended; do you suppose I should have seen anything?" Lou eagerly asked.

"Of course not, unless you had been foolish and fanciful, as I was."

"Then I should n't dare to go, for I am foolish, and I imagine all sorts of absurd things. I shouldn't *dare* to go there now, even at noonday!"

The curtains which half shut the window recess from the room were drawn back at this moment, somewhat hesitatingly, and a frank, handsome face which Lou had seen but once before looked in.

"Philip—in spite of the rain!" Mrs. Boynton exclaimed, rising to greet him, for the intruder was indeed Mr. Temple, who evinced a shade of embarrassment upon seeing that she was not alone.

Lou rose to go; but Mrs. Boynton detained her.

"You two will be the best of friends in half an hour," Tracy declared, when she had presented Philip, and he had accepted a seat *tete-a-tete* with both.

"I am sure we shall," Lou coincided, convinced that Mr. Temple strongly resembled Roy Blanchard. As she covertly watched his face, however, she could not decide for the life of her in what the resemblance consisted. Perhaps it was because they were both gentlemen, and about equally prepossessing.

Lou was keenly observant, and when Philip had first looked in upon them she noticed that her companion started and paled slightly.

"I wonder if it wasn't *his* face that she saw reflected in the spring?" she mentally asked herself.

"Did you expect a little rain could keep me all day in that dull place, with brightness so near?" Temple exclaimed.

"No, I expected you," Tracy admitted. The color had returned to her cheeks, the brilliance to her eyes. Even Lou noticed that Mrs. Boynton's dreamy loveliness was enhanced by a new, indescribable charm.

"By the way, I met your husband just outside as I came," Philip went on. "He was laden with fishing-tackle, and with two or three others was starting off to

a brook which is fabled to contain trout. I don't know where the brook is, and I'm skeptical about the trout. There may be eels, and possibly minnows. He told me to come in and hunt you up. As he didn't ask me to go with him I suppose he did not care for my companionship. Possibly he feared that I were a better angler than he, or that I would bribe the trout."

Lou laughed at his bright humor ; and Tracy smiled, though she frowned at first.

"So he has gone, after all!" she exclaimed, half involuntarily.

"Then you didn't know?" in some surprise, and with a penetrating glance.

"He spoke of going, but thought it rained too much," she quickly explained, and his suspicion that there had been disagreement between them was set aside. And she added :

"I'm glad he did not invite you to join them, for I fear you would have been tempted to go beyond your power to withstand."

"Perhaps I should; human nature is weak. And that reminds me that I met with a rather curious adventure last night, as I was returning to the cottage from here."

A rift of pallor crossed Tracy Boynton's face, and she turned hastily toward the window to hide it. But Lou Wentworth noted her agitation, and bent eagerly forward, curious to hear what Mr. Temple had to relate.

At the same moment someone in the next room suddenly struck a low, sweet prelude upon the great piano. The music rose and throbbed upon the air with a melody as strange, and weird as that of an æolian harp.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DREAM OF MUSIC.

"If he, compact of the jars, grow musical,
We shall have shortly discord in the spheres."
—*As You Like It.*

Mr. Temple told the story of his adventure with the illusive light, appending the statements of Mr. and Mrs. Webb. His listeners did not once interrupt him.

Miss Wentworth fairly trembled with intense interest in the romantic tale. Tracy gazed out upon the dreary landscape until he had finished; and all the while the music rose and fell with plaintive sweetness in the adjoining room.

"I shall be afraid to stay near this mountain if it is infested with such serie apparitions and secrets," Lou exclaimed, when he had finished.

"We will form a committee of investigation one of these days, and unearth the trickster who would victimize us," Temple returned, with assumed lightness.

"Who knows but we may discover a bevy of witches, chanting over their cauldron and cooking a charm, up among the rocks," Tracy suggested, facing her companions.

"Perhaps it was thence that the thunder was conjured yesterday, when I found you crouching upon the mountain-side," Philip laughed.

Lou clapped her hands to her ears, quickly crying:

"You'll drive me mad with your uncanny suggestions if you keep on. I feel as though I had just awakened from a nightmare already."

They all laughed to banish the spell.

"That music affects me more than Mr. Temple's story," Mrs. Boynton declared, with a shrug of her graceful shoulders. "Whom can it be playing, Lou?"

"One whose fingers evoke the strangest melody to

which I ever listened," Philip said, listening. "I shall dream of that music," he added, a moment later.

"I will know whom the magician is," Lou exclaimed, darting away from them like a fairy. When she had gone, Mr. Temple bent his face a little nearer his companion.

"I had a dream last night which has haunted me ever since," he said, unconsciously using a lower tone.

"A dream of music?" she questioned.

"No, though it was rather weird. Stimulated, probably, by my odd experience in the evening. My unexpected meeting with you had something to do with it, also."

"Aren't you going to tell us what it was? You have stirred up my curiosity, and now you have no right to disappoint it."

"I didn't intend to tell you." A faint blush mantled his cheeks, which from the first she had noticed were rather pale.

"It is hardly suitable for me to repeat, under the circumstances," he added.

"You should not even dream of unsuitable things," Mrs. Boynton declared.

"I suppose not. Nor of ridiculous ones, either, presume?"

"Then your dream was ridiculous? And it has haunted you ever since! And you think it was partly stimulated by meeting me, as though *that* were ridiculous."

Her *badinage* reminded him of the old days before their separation so strongly as to give him pain.

"You used to talk in that way when—but you remember," he exclaimed. This was the first time he had made allusion to former times; an irresistible impulse impelled the remark.

"And you didn't enjoy it very well, if I remember rightly," she returned, in the same light tone.

She was intently examining the petals of a tea-rose as

she spoke. The flower was withered and odorless—one which someone had tossed upon the window-seat the evening before.

"I preferred a more serious strain in those days—with you at least," Philip declared.

Now that they were upon the subject, both found it irrestibly fascinating. Each was curious to hear what the other had to say.

"It all doubtless seems very foolish, as you think of it now?" she went on, without raising her eyes to his face.

The music at this moment rose in fuller volume, and she was obliged to lean toward him to hear his reply.

"No, it does not," he replied, very gravely. "*I* was at the years of discretion even then, you will bear in mind," he added, the emphasis very light yet plain upon the personal pronoun.

"So you were, now I think of it!" She glanced up at him and smiled as she said this.

He smiled also, although the attempt was little better than a ghastly grimace.

"You were fortunate in escaping my serious designs, considering your youth," he said, stimulated for the retort. "Your forethought was quite Promethean, in fact. I should think you would thank the stars under which you were born for your great good fortune."

"Then you really think I am fortunate?" she quickly asked, as though interpreting his remark seriously.

"In one sense, certainly," he replied.

"I don't mean that." She said this with an impatient gesture. And looking him frankly in the face she went on: "You know I liked you then, and like you now. You would have made me happy." This was delicate ground, and the color deepened upon her cheeks. But she had an end to reach, and did not falter. "It is not that I escaped disappointment by refusing *you*. But I wish you to tell me what you think—of *him!*"

The instant the words had passed her lips, she realized that she had not said what she intended to say. The

whole remark verged upon an impropriety. He saw her confusion; a finer sense than many possess permitted him to understand, better than herself, the promptings of her words.

"I think he is evidently a very evil-minded man; possibly a murderer, or red-handed pirate masquerading under respectable colors," Philip Temple declared, as though he thought her impetuous query had been made in jest. And the delicate turn of his retort relieved her embarrassment, which it was in his power to have made painful.

But it was not in his heart to allow her even to inflict pain upon herself.

Her confusion was still further banished by the appearance of Miss Wentworth, whose dimpled face wore an almost rapt expression.

"Did you *ever* here such music?" she cried, in a whisper which was very shrill.

Once more they became concious of the rythmic, throbbing melody, which rose and fell like the breaking of surf upon a distant shore. At times it died away to a faint murmur, as though an adverse wind bore the sounds another way. Then it would swell upon the air again, like a strong wind sweeping the tuneful strings of an æolian harp.

As Philip had said, it was such music as one might dream of.

"It is wonderful," Temple said.

"I wish it would stop!" Mrs. Boynton exclaimed, half-breathlessly.

"You haven't told us yet the name of the performer?" Philip reminded.

"You couldn't guess in a week." Lou returned.

"Probably not, as I don't know anyone in the house, except Mrs. Boynton and yourself."

"I sha'n't tell you, either, you shall come and see for yourself. All the people are in there, and they are under a spell, I think. You will be surprisd, Tracy, more than

I was, because—but I won't give you a single clue, come?"

She beckoned them on, and half-mechanically they followed. They passed through one deserted room and reached the doorway of another—the one where the piano was.

They paused upon the threshold and looked in. All the guests were there, some standing, others sitting. As Lou Wentworth had expressed it, they seemed to have fallen under a spell. But it was broken at the moment, for the music ceased.

The player rose from the instrument, shrugged his shoulders, walked over to the fireplace and bathed his hands in the warmth.

It was Mr. Brock!

There was a moment of breathless silence, and then someone attempted to applaud. But only one or two others joined in, and the attempt was abandoned amid some embarrassment.

There was likewise a murmur of "wonderful," "weird," and kindered expressions, which became quite general.

Mr. Brock bowed and smiled his acknowledgment, and sinking upon a chair, abandoned himself to the pleasure of getting warm.

"Did you ever hear the like, Mrs. Boynton?" exclaimed Alma Burton, who had drawn near them. She was rather tall, rather pale, and evidently of the dreamy, listless type of young women, who are always popular with the other sex, though they sometimes fail to get a husband of their very own. Alma's eyes were dark, her lashes long, and she lent everyone an impression that she was beautiful. Yet a closer study of her features brought disappointment. She was not even pretty. She merely knew how to smile, and possessed a pleasing voice.

"I never wish to again," Tracy replied, in an incautious tone. Mr. Brock glanced toward them in his alert fashion, but it was unlikely that he distinguished her words, as he betrayed no signs of having done so.

"Then you didn't enjoy it?" Alma questioned so cautiously that Mr. Brock could not by any possibility overhear. For Miss Burton always took care that no one should dislike her.

"No. It sounded like the performer—subtle, dangerous to the senses!"

They were in the next room when this was spoken, so there was no danger of giving offense to the object of the remark.

"Tracy is so queer," Lou exclaimed. "She likes or dislikes everybody. There is no half-way with her, I'm not like that. There are those I hate, and others that I love, and a great many whom I call my friends, and yet don't care very much for them."

"And I like everybody," declared Alma, with one of her rare smiles. She might have added with equal truth that no one disliked her.

Philip had stopped to speak to Mr. Brock. He now came up, and was presented to Miss Burton.

"Mr. Brock declares that the reception his music has met with gave him the chills," Temple said, laughing.

"Poor fellow! I really pity him," Alma exclaimed.

"If there is one who pities, she should let the sentiment do the object some good."

This was Mrs. Boynton's suggestion.

"It would be a sight for the gods, Alma bestowing consolation upon Mr. Brock," cried Lou. "They say that pity is akin to love," she added, perhaps a little spitefully.

> "'To trace all actions to their secret springs,
> Would make indeed some melancholy mirth!'"

Alma sweetly quoted.

Just then Roy Blanchard appeared, and upon some slight pretext—it did not require a great one—he led Alma and Lou away.

At the same time Philip made a discovery. It was a rift of sunlight upon the floor. It faded even while he was looking, yet it promised a clearing up of the storm.

"The discovery is ours, and let us be the first to behold the departure of the vanquished clouds," Tracy exclaimed, a sudden glow brightening her cheeks. In a moment they were out upon the veranda. To their surprise they saw that the broken clouds through which the sunshine gleamed were low upon the western horizon. "Another day nearly gone," said Philip. And he added: "I must go, Tracy. Jason Webb promised to help me investigate the mystery which I encountered last night. Do you know, that silly adventure has haunted me ever since it occurred!"

She looked at him searchingly. "And your dream of last night,—does that haunt you, too?" she questioned.

He smiled, hesitated, then answered:

"Yes, and you shall know what it was, though it is bad taste in me to repeat it. You will bear in mind that it was only a dream."

"I will remember."

"Well, I dreampt that I was thirsty, and bent over a spring of water to drink."

He hesitated again, seeing a fixed, startled look come into her face.

"Go on—go on!" she breathlessly exclaimed.

"And I saw your face reflected there; and, as I might once have done, I bent to kiss the image. The contact awoke me, and I found—" He interrupted himself, for Mrs. Boynton's face had grown deathly white, and she seemed about to swoon.

At the same time he became conscious of a third presence. And turning, he saw, bundled up in an overcoat, the eccentric Mr. Brock!

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAGIC SPRING.

"Of love that never found his earthly close,
What sequel?"

Tennyson.

By a powerful effort Tracy Boynton controlled the sudden sense of faintness which had come upon her. The sight of Mr. Brock stimulated her effort, as a sudden danger which called for vigorous self-defense might have done.

Mr. Brock was close behind Philip, yet there was no sign that he had overheard what the young man was saying. He seemed absorbed in watching the red glow that lit up the distant trees and clouds.

Philip would have stepped forward to assist his companion, but by a slight, yet vehement gesture she waved him back.

"A shoolboy's dream I should call that," she said, in a tone of forced lightness. Then, while he was bewildered by her pallor and incongruous speech, she added:

"Perhaps you were thinking of the romantic stories told of the spring over yonder, which is said to reflect the face of one's sweetheart if one drinks from it by moonlight. Of course you have heard about it—your Mr. Webb is of course familiar with all the fables concerning places of interest in this vicinity."

"The Magic Spring, is it called?" Philip questioned.

Mr. Brock suddenly seemed to become cognizant of their presence. He faced them, and gravely said:

"You young people may laugh at such things, but you'll see the day that you'll believe in 'em."

Both looked at him in surprise. There was an expression of deep earnestness upon his cold, white face.

"So you put faith in that sort of thing?" Philip questioned.

"Yes, and with reason," he replied.

"You have had personal experience?"

"Yes. And I've seen others have it. Minds impress minds when they are distant from each other. There are laws we know nothing, or very little about. Scientists don't count them as worthy of investigation; such as you laugh at them; ignorant people run away from them. I suppose, Mr Temple, that you've heard of the mysterious lights seen upon the mountain base at night? The spot is yonder, half mile or such a matter from here. Decidedly odd, and worth looking into, I take it."

Mr Brock buttoned his coat more closely and thrust his hands deep in his pockets, as though it were a bitter cold day.

"Have you seen the phenomenon?" Philip questioned.

"Yes, once. I'm seldom out after sunset, however. Evening gives me a chill even indoors. But I saw it once. Tried to find where it was, with usual results. Illusive, mysterious, aggravating. May look into the matter at some future time. I may not What's *your* idea? Got a theory, I suppose?"

"I have no theory," Philip replied. The other shrugged his shoulders and abruptly rose.

"Sun setting in a cloud—sign of more rain," he declared, in evident disgust. And then, with a nod:

"Good night. When Boynton comes I'd like to see him. Game of whist on the docket."

The black moustache moved in what might, or might not, have been a smile, and then the eccentric man stalked into the house.

In silence Philip descended the steps, and walked slowly along the path. Mrs. Boynton walked by his side. As Mr. Brock had declared, the sun was sinking into a cloud. The western horizon was rugged and uneven in outline. There were mountains and hills, lying in a long irregular range, blue and misty in the distance. They were crowned with a glory of purple and gold. The gold, however, was fading, and the purple became more somber.

Along the path lay lights and shadows, wavering and swaying, assuming fantastic outlines, coming and going like the joys and sorrows of life. The valley below, with the zigzag road, lay fresh and green, as though it were newly made, verdure and all.

Presently Mrs. Boynton paused, cast a quick glance backward.

"I must go no farther, or I shall not dare return alone," she said.

"Perhaps we may meet your husband if we keep on," Philip suggested.

"He will not be alone, and I had rather not meet him with the others. I wish he had not gone at all. I hoped he would stay and help to make it pleasant for you. I wish you to become friends."

She spoke very earnestly, her voice so low that he could not have distinguished her words but for the perfect stillness that reigned around them.

"Perhaps he doesn't care to count me as a friend," the young man returned. Unconsciously, when alone together, they had assumed the low, confidential tones and manner which had characterized their conversations in former days.

"It isn't that, Philip," she quickly said. There was another brief pause. And then:

"Chester and you are very unlike each other. He is not one to form strong friendships. He is rather indifferent toward those whom he calls 'ordinary people.' He has a great mind, and a great soul."

Philip looked at her with covert keenness. How beautiful she was! He lingered at her side as though under a spell.

"Did you ever speak to him of me!" he presently asked. "Before we met yesterday, I mean," he added, as she hesitated.

"No," she answered.

"Why not?"

"There never came a fit time, but once. Once we

were speaking of a young couple of our acquaintance who broke what was supposed to be a virtual engagement. I then came near speaking of you and our former relations. But he uttered a rem rk that sealed my lips."

"What did he say?"

"That he would as soon wed the divorced wife of another, as one who had been affianced. He believes that a sentiment, although buried for a time, is immortal, and may spring into life again."

Philip Temple's face was very pale; but the sunset glow falling upon it disguised the fact.

"I believe that love, if genuine, is never buried," he declared, speaking slowly, yet in a firm, even tone. "There are betrothals which are the mere fruits of fancy," he went on, "and these may be broken and renewed, likethe sworn friendships of boys and girls at school. They are without foundation, and like a bubble, they are dissipated, as they ought to be. But there are betrothals in which the hand of fate is unmistakably present. These are some times broken. But the sentiment prompting them is never buried. It springs from the roots of their mutual existence, and although they may be separated, and marry a later choice, the first love merely sleeps. Misfortune, misunderstanding, the common discords of life may awaken it, and the realization that a mistake has been made will come like a shock."

Temple paused; his gaze had been fixed upon the deepening shadows of the valley; now he faced his companion, his countenance lighted by the frank smile which bespoke only a chivalrous, honorable friendliness.

"What is *your* belief, Tracy?" he questioned.

"Mine?" She raised her eyes to his face for a moment. Then abruptly:

"Look yonder and you will see a pair of lovers, pure and simple!"

He turned to glance in the direction indicated, and saw Roy Blanchard, in a stooping posture, and being transformed into a savage at the hands of Lou Wentworth—

at least, in appearance, for he was bedecked from head to foot in clematis and trailing evergreen. At the same time Philip heard the rustle of drapery, and turning, saw Mrs Boynton running away from him with the lightness and grace of a gazelle.

"Good night!" he called after her But she did not even glance backward in response. In another moment she was hidden from view.

Temple turned away with a sense of indescribable disappointment. Why should he experience such a feeling? In a vague sort of way he asked himself the question But he did not answer it As he strode rapidly along the path, a sense of weighty depression assailed him.

"I'll go away to-morrow!" he exclaimed, as he hastened on through the gathering shadows. "There is no reason why I should remain here Mr. Boynton, it is evident, dislikes me. I had hoped that they might help me to pass the month of my sojourn here more happily. But such is not my good fortune."

The resolution to go away on the morrow was but the result of an impulse, and that quickly passed. As he neared the point at which he had met with the curious adventure upon the night before, his thoughts were diverted from the fit of moodiness into which he had fallen.

It was not yet dark. Under the shadow of the mountain the twilight lingered long. Around the rock beyond which he had seen the mysterious light mingled light and shadows lay. They danced and shifted grotesquely with the slowly swaying branches of the surrounding trees and shrubbery. A soft breeze, which had suddenly sprung up into life, whispered amidst the foliage, and sent down showers of water from the laden leaves.

Temple paused and glanced toward the spot whence the mysterious light had gleamed. A sense of vague uneasiness stole over him. A red squirrel scampered past him, and he started as though he feared assault. In this place all sounds and all objects assumed a weirdness

that was almost oppressive. But he did not see the illusive light.

"It is too early," he reflected. And then he laughed outright. "As though I really expected to encounter some uncanny apparition," he added, contemptuously. "I will look the ground over now, while there is sufficient light. I will see for myself if there is not some easily discoverable cause for the phenomenon which has puzzled so many. A little coolness and care may clear up the whole affair."

He began pushing his way through the labyrinth of undergrowth. As he did so, a sudden "swish" in his rear caused him to abruptly face about.

CHAPTER X.

THE LIGHT AGAIN.

"I have thee not, and yet I see thee still,
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight?" *Macbeth.*

Temple saw the figure of a man in the path; a young stalwart fellow, who had paused, and was peering through the shrubbery.

"Halloa, Webb!" Philip ejaculated, advancing.

"So you're here ahead of me," the young farmer returned, in his quiet tone.

The two looked into each other's faces in mute questioning for a moment.

"I've seen nothing yet," Temple declared, at length.

"Been here long?" the other asked.

"No, I was on my way to your house. I thought I wouldn't keep Mrs. Webb waiting for me to-night."

"If you want your supper, we'll go over. But I thought maybe you would rather stop and investigate this business first Just as you say."

"If it makes no difference to your wife—"

Webb interrupted by a gesture.

"Not a bit," he declared. He glanced upward at the heavy clouds and added:

"We might wait till a better night. The storm isn't over with yet I guess. Looks to me as though we should have a young deluge before morning." Even as he spoke the patter of huge raindrops sounded around them.

"I'm not afraid of the rain; I rather like it, in fact," Temple returned.

Indeed, the more difficult the adventure, the greater zest in its pursuit in his present mood.

There was a sort of pleasant excitement in the anticipation of genuine adventure. For, although he did not believe in the supernatural, Philip was impressed by a

certainty that he was upon the eve of an extraordinary experience.

"Just as you say," Webb declared. He led the way to a spot partly under the huge, shelving rock, and said:

"We might as well wait here until it gets darker. We can't find nothing by daylight. Maybe there'll nothing happen to-night, anyhow. Be just our luck, wouldn't it?"

The rain began to fall heavily, and the twilight rapidly deepened into darkness. The moon would not set for an hour or more, and it promised to be very dark before that time, for the clouds already obscured its feeble light.

Webb produced and lighted a lantern.

"Thought this would help us some," he said.

"We shall need it, without doubt." Temple paused, and then added, with a laugh: "Aren't you afraid the ghosts will break it for you?"

"No, I guess not. I sha'n't run till I'm obliged to I can take care of myself, I think, and I guess you can"

"This is a queer sort of adventure for me to be mixed up with," said Temple, half-musingly. It was now raining so heavily that there was a dull roar all around them. It presently slackened, however, and Jason Webb rose to his feet.

"I'm going to see if it's *there*," he declared.

"The light, you mean?"

"Yes."

He handed his lantern to Temple and added:

"Keep that and stay here till I come back. We don't want to scare the spooks off to begin with, you know."

Philip took the lantern, and crouched close underneath the rock, which effectually kept off the rain. Jason Webb glided out into the path, and passed from view.

Several long, silent moments dragged away. Silent, save for the dripping rain and slight rustling sound of the foliage stirred by the light breeze. Then the stout form of Webb came into view.

"It's *there!*" he announced in a whisper.

"The light?" Philip questioned.

"Yes."

"In the usual place?"

"Just the same. Rather brighter than usual, though. Owing to the darkness, probably."

Jason Webb's tones did not betray the slightest trace of excitement. But, although incredulous and determined, Mr. Temple could not help a sensation of vague apprehension.

"We'll find out what it all means if there's any way to do it," he exclaimed, stepping forth into the path.

In another moment the twain stood at the point whence the mysterious light was visible. There it was, bright, steady, save for the twinkling effect lent bp the swaying shrubbery

Philip looked down at the ground at his feet. Rifts of light and shadow, cast by the mysterious glow, were visible there.

"Nothing ghostly about that, to all appearance," he declared, audibly.

"I should say there wasn't, and the next thing is to go to it. How shall we do that? Together?"

"Yes."

"And if we find nothing?"

"Then one of us will come back, and the other stay, with the lantern. Then the one in the path can tell whether the light still shines or whether it's an illusion peculiar to this exact point of view. It's mighty persistent anyhow. I'm getting dead in earnest."

Temple was, indeed, thoroughly aroused. A practical, clear-headed man dislikes to encounter any puzzle that appears simple, and yet will not be solved.

Temple strode forward with the lantern. Webb followed close at his heels. Both were fearless, determined, bent upon clearing up a mystery which had baffled them before.

They got through the dense shrubbery, and reached that point from which the mysterious light, if it did not

move from the original position, would again become visible.

"As I expected," declared Webb, as they paused and stared blankly ahead. For the object of their quest was no longer visible. Only darkness, and that of the blackest sort, lay before them.

"Of course, it disappeared," Philip impatiently replied. And added:

"We'll see where it went to, however, and at short notice. Come."

The twain advanced side by side.

The way was very rough, and they were obliged to proceed with caution. They presently found their further progress barred by a perpendicular rock, that rose fully twenty feet above their heads.

"This is as far as we can go in this direction," Webb declared.

"This is the exact point from which the light shone, isn't it?" Philip questioned.

"I should say it was."

"Then the spook, if it is one, is rather close to us I fancy that we can solve this mystery if we stay here long enough. Whoever is playing this pretty trick will get tired of hiding, and if we stay here till daylight we'll have a chance then to find where he keeps himself. But to begin with we'll carry out my original purpose. You or I will return to the path. Which shall it be? The one who stays here will keep the lantern."

"I'll stay, Mr. Temple," Webb declared, with quiet decisiveness.

"Had you rather?"

"Yes. I guess I can handle the spook easier than you could, if he happened to be muscular. I ain't very slow in a tussle," the young farmer said.

He was, indeed, a powerfully built fellow, and with muscles hardened by toil, he would not be a safe man to attack. Besides, he possessed a degree of coolness which Philip Temple envied. Although sufficiently resolute,

he could not repress a feeling of intense anxiety concerning the result of their bold investigation.

"If you want my help, call," Temple said, as he turned to retrace his steps. He abruptly paused and added:

"If I see two lights I shall know one of them is your lantern."

"Yes, and I'll h'ist mine up and down, so that you'll know which it is," the other returned.

Philip picked his way cautiously over the rugged rocks and through the dense shrubbery. Reaching the path, he turned to look back. At the same time he caught the sound of a hasty exclamation from his companion.

To his consternation, *no light was visible.*

"What is it, Webb?" Philip shouted, thrilled by a vague alarm.

There was no response, yet, at that moment, a light appeared at the paint at which he had left Jason and the lantern.

"Are you all right? I can see only one light; is that yours?" Temple again shouted, louder than before.

Was it imagination? Or did he hear a muffled response? Why did not his companion answer plainly? Had anything happened to him?

Once more the young man called:

"Jason Webb—speak!"

He listened intently for a response. It was raining heavily again; the drip, drip of water from the foliage sounded near him; at a little distance a small mountain stream, formed by the heavy rain, splashed and gurgled. These, and only these, sounds were audible.

A sudden suspicion dawned upon Philip's active brain. "Thinks to frighten me, does he?" he audibly exclaimed. "Who knows but this sharp young farmer is at the bottom of the whole hoax? If he is, I shall let him laugh at me, that's all. But he seemed to be in earnest Only he was pretty cool. These country

people usually have superstitious notions, and don't fancy this sort of a trick. I'll know the truth, at all events. I won't be laughed at for cowardice, if I am for my pains."

Philip once more pushed his way through the dense shrubbery. He had an umbrella, but among the bushes he could only use it as a cane, with which to feel his way, and in consequence he was already drenched to the skin.

He got through the bushes once more, and looked for the light.

It was gone.

Again Temple experienced a thrill akin to fear, yet he did not flinch.

"Hoax or not, I'll not be frightened away," he muttered.

He groped his way forward, and reached the perpendicular wall of rock. As he did so his foot came in contact with a yielding body. He stopped, and with a sensation of intense horror, discovered that the form of a man lay prostrate at his feet.

To strike a match was but the work of an instant, and a tiny point of light fell upon the upturned face of Jason Webb!

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE IS BLIND.

"Love is blind, and lovers cannot see."

—*Shakspeare.*

"Where did Alma go so suddenly?" Roy Blanchard questioned, abruptly rising from the crouching posture in which he had been submitting to Lou Wentworth's unique decorations.

"You might institute a search for her," the other demurely suggested. Her face was daintily flushed; it seemed to have taken on a brighter, sweeter radiance than it usually wore.

"A good idea," Roy returned. With clematis and evergreens pendent from his hat and shoulders, his appearance was decidedly grotesque. But no amount of absurdity in garb could detract an iota from his manly beauty. He looked like the prince in some fairy tale, with the golden sunset light atremble upon his fine face, and lending a deeper bronze to his beard.

He started, as though to begin the quest at once. Then he looked back with a smile and said:

"Come, Lou."

"Where?"

"In search of Miss Burton."

"Do you really wish to find her?"

"Of course."

"Then I'll go back. You can't expect to charm us both at the same time."

There was the old flash of resentment in her tones, and she turned away.

He was at her side in a moment, and gazing down upon her with genuine, tender pleading in his eyes.

"Don't say that, dearest!" he exclaimed.

"Who gave you the right to call me that?" she retorted.

"A power that bestows the right on whom it belongs."

"Ah! and will you kindly tell me what power it is that favors *you* so greatly?"

"The power of love."

"Love!" Lou laughed a trifle scornfully.

"Love for yourself, or for Alma?" she questioned, looking him fully in the face.

"You are cruel to say that," he returned. He cast a hasty glance about them, and then bent his head until his beard touched her cheek.

"Do you really think I care for Alma Burton?" he asked.

"I hope so," she replied, without looking at him.

"You hope I do?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you have made her care for you. Do you think it is right to win a prize merely for the zest of the pursuit, and then cast it off?"

"No, I do not think it is right. It is a monstrous wrong."

There was a suppressed vehemence in his tones, for which Lou could not account.

She looked cautiously up into his face. But his glance was fixed upon the deepening shadows, and she could read nothing there.

"So do I," she said, speaking slowly. There was a period of silence—a silence full of vague meaning to each. Was there an unconscious misunderstanding between them, or was Roy Blanchard fickle, as he seemed?

"We seem to agree pretty well, in the matter of theory and principal," he declared, at length, with an odd smile.

"I don't understand. I was not aware that we were discussing ethics," she returned.

"I was, if you were not. I suppose your coincidence of opinion was merely an evidence of your good nature —your desire to please. I can hardly believe that you really agree with me in this matter."

"I wish you would be a little more plain, Mr. Blanch-

ard. Your gravity is a trifle appalling, in view of my ignorance of what it is all about."

"We were speaking of winning prizes only to cast them off after they were won, were we not? At least you suggested the subject, but perhaps you were thinking of something else at the time."

"Oh, yes." She laughed then, perhaps to hide some other emotion.

"We settled that question, did we not?" she added.

"Yes. As I said, we agreed upon theory. But I fear that you believe as I do out of deference rather than from your heart. Certainly, in practice you sadly contradict your declared principle."

"So you think I'm not sincere?" she asked, looking up at him. There was a peculiar light in her eyes. It strongly resembled repressed anger.

"I fear you are not. If you are, then you are fickle. I believe I had rather have you the latter, for insincerity in a woman is the worst of attributes—worse than an ugly temper."

This was deliberately spoken, as though he were playing a card upon which a game was to be won or lost.

She stepped quickly away from him and then paused, facing him, in a pretty, spirited attitude. Her arms were flung upward, and her white fingers clasped above her head. In the gathering gloom she looked like a statue which Roy had once seen in a gallery of art.

"What a moralist you are, to be sure!" she cried "Do you know," she added, with fine sarcasm, "that you used the very phrases, just now, that I once heard from the lips of a very good preacher? Perhaps you heard the same sermon. But I had rather not believe you a plagiarist. Such fine sentiments lose their force when sounded by an echo."

It was Roy's turn to show irritation. He was sensitive, and her scorn stung him keenly. He looked at her in silence for a moment. But he repressed the sharp retort that rose to his lips.

"I saw you weeping the other day for a cause that impelled me to admire you more than ever before," he slowly said. She looked at him, smiling, and he went on, in the same measured tone:

"A swallow, sailing swiftly over the house, encountered a telephone wire in its flight, and fell upon the ground with a broken wing, you saw it, and expressed true feminine sympathy for the unfortunate creature. And then, when Mr. Boynton took it up and with cold mercy put it out of its misery, I saw tears in your eyes—tears which must have been prompted by tenderness."

He paused again. Then he added:

"And yet you seem to delight in inflicting pain upon me."

"You are not a swallow," she said, with rigid iciness. "And I am not worthy so much consideration as even a single sparrow?"

"Oh, yes—rather more, I think. But you're not so defenseless. If you were I might weep for *you*—at least, I'm sure I should if you flew against a telephone wire and broke a wing."

He did not smile, and she exclaimed:

"*Don't* be so solemn, Mr. Blanchard. We can at least be friendly, can't we?"

"Yes, we can be friendly," he answered in an altered voice. "And as friends," he added, "we will try and find Alma. I'm almost alarmed about her. And see—it is going to rain again."

He drew her hand within his arm unresisted, and in silence they turned down a narrow path that led to the zigzag road.

"So you think Alma likes me?" he presently questioned.

"Doesn't your vanity tell you?" she returned.

"I have no vanity."

"I beg pardon—I know better, of course. I dare say you fancy yourself a sort of a Caliban, too ugly to be

looked upon without causing sensations of repulsion in the beholder. Of course you are not vain."

Her irony sounded good natured at least, and he laughed in response.

"You overrate my modesty," he said. "I really am aware that I'm tremendously good looking. Sometimes I've doubted, but I have consulted my barber and my tailor upon the subject, and they swear that I'm their handsomest customer. Thus am I reassured. Yet, when I'm with the ladies, I find that they shrink from me whenever I make the least approach to seriousness. They like me to make wit for them; but I'm an ogre when I grow sentimental."

"Now you excite my compassion," Miss Wentworth demurely remarked.

"I knew I should. You see, this condition of things keeps up a terrible strain upon that portion of my brain which manufactures wit."

"I beg pardon," she interrupted.

"What is it?"

"You are mistaken in a point of phrenology, I'm afraid. I have been told that wit doesn't come from the brain. It is said to be spontaneous, like sneezing."

Roy laughed at this, so heartily that his companion joined in the outburst of mirth.

"Who told you that?" he asked.

"I think I read it. Or perhaps it was *my* wit that prompted the fancy."

"Then I shall not credit the theory. I had rather believe that my brain is capable of something."

"It *is* a pleasing delusion isn't it?" she returned, sympathetically.

"To me it is."

He then held up his hand, with a glance at the darkening clouds.

"It is beginning to rain," he declared.

"And here is Alma," Lou exclaimed, as a tall, graceful figure came toward them.

"I—I feared I was lost!" she breathlessly cried, as she came up to them. "I have been wandering about for half an hour, and I began to think I had gotten a long way from the hotel. Is it far?" she asked.

"They could hear you there if you should shout," Roy replied.

"We were looking for you," he added, "but would have given up the search in a moment more."

"And left me to perish in the storm?" she plaintively questioned.

"No, not that. Lou might have done so, but I would not. I should have looked for you at break of day."

They hastened toward the house, for the rain began falling in huge drops.

They separated upon the veranda, and entered at different doors.

"We are friends?" Roy found opportunity to ask, as he lingered an instant in the hall.

"Yes," Lou answered. And then Mrs. Boynton came along, and Roy hastily left them.

"Did you see nothing of Chester?" Tracy questioned, as her friend drew her into an adjacent room.

"No. Then he has not returned?"

"He has not returned," the young wife echoed.

Even as she spoke, the sound of excited voices in the hall caused them to listen in vague alarm.

CHAPTER XII.

VAIN, MALICIOUS MOCKERY.

"It is as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.
—*Shakspeare.*

"Heavens! he is dead!" Philip Temple exclaimed, as his gaze fell upon the pale. upturned face of Jason Webb. At the same time the assertion was contradicted, however; for the form moved, and as the match went out the young farmer opened his eyes.

"No, I ain't dead!" he declared, rather faintly. "Help me up, and we'll get out of this place!" he added.

Temple complied without uttering a word. Webb leaned heavily upon his arm, but they managed to work their way back to the path.

"Now let me rest a bit," Jason said, breathlessly.

He seated himself upon the wet ground, with his back against a small tree. Then Philip found voice to speak.

"Tell me what happened?" he eagerly questioned.

"I was knocked down—that's all!" was the terse response.

"And your lantern?"

"Smashed, same as Jim Rice's was. Only he hung onto a part of his'n, and I didn't."

They were silent a moment. The water dripped upon them, and around them. Philip glanced toward the spot of mystery. With a shudder, he saw the mysterious, tantilizing light, bright, fixed, inviting their investigation.

"Is it there?" Webb asked.

"Yes."

"I've half a mind to go back there, and let 'em try that trick over ag'in!" the young farmer exclaimed.

"I wouldn't if I were you."

"Going to give it up?"

"Your not strong enough to do more to-night. What-

ever or whoever the being may be, it has a decided advantage over us, and I don't like to run unnecessary risks. We'll try again sometime, with more to help us. We will merely postpone our investigations to a more propitious time."

"Maybe you're right. But I hate to give up. I don't want the spook to laugh at me, and it won't, when I get through with it."

Webb rose to his feet, and also glanced toward the light. It still blinked through the interstices of the intervening shrubbery.

The man stooped, groped in the path with his hand, and then stood erect.

"I'm going to heave a stone at the darned thing, as a parting salute!" he exclaimed.

He suited his action to the word. The sharp click of the missile as it struck the perpendicular rock sounded distinctly. *And the liyht disappeared!*

"Put his eye out, didn't I?" Webb exclaimed triumphantly. "Now I guess we'll go home. I've got a bunch on my head growing big's a hen's-egg." he added, as they started toward the cottage.

"Did you see nothing before you were struck?" Temple asked.

"Not a thing. Whoever played the trick stood behind, or above me, I can't say which."

"Was there anything ghostly about it?"

"I can't say. Never had any personal experience with 'em, unless this *is* a ghost. But the rap I received was pretty substantial."

They continued to discuss the remarkable adventure until they reached the cottage. And there they were received with unmistakable relief by Jenny, who had grown white-faced with apprehension.

There the subject was discussed again in all its points. And when there was nothing more that could be said concerning it, they each in turn related ghost stories which

they had heard, as people do when stimulated by a fresh experience.

In the morning the rain had ceased. It dawned cool and delightful, and Philip Temple was out in good season.

He accompanied Webb to the scene of their late adventure, and there they found the broken lantern, just as it had fallen from Jason's hand. The glass globe was shattered, and the metal considerably dented.

"They hit it with a rock, I should say," Temple declared, after a careful examination of the implement.

"I guess they hit me with one, too," declared his companion.

They proceeded to make a thorough exploration of the premises. But without significant result.

"Nothing here in daytime, jest as I told you," Jason reiterated.

"There are rocks, and plenty of thickets to serve as hiding-places," Temple replied.

"Of course there is. But they don't signify anything. It's the spooks, if there be any, that we want to catch."

"I don't know as I really care to catch one, if that is the real character of the denizens of this place."

"Perhaps you're right—I guess I don't neither." Jason laughed good humoredly. Just then they were startled by the sound of footsteps in the path.

"Hulloa—who comes now?" the young farmer exclaimed. The person approaching was a tall, lank individual, with thin, "sandy" whiskers and moustache, and very large eyes. In truth, the man's eyes were the most prominent of his features. "Jim Rice, sure as I live," Webb declared, as they came forth upon the path and confronted the new-comer.

There was no introduction. Temple had not seen this man before, yet Rice knew the former to be his neighbor's "city boarder."

"Looking for my hoss," he announced, in a somewhat nasal tone.

Temple thought he ought to be able to see the animal if

anybody could, with such eyes. But he didn't voice this mental comment.

"Lost him?" Jason questioned.

"Yes. Jumped out of the pastur' I guess. Found one of the bars broke last night. Tracked him up this way, but somehow I can't see what become of him. The ground was soft yesterday, you know, on account of the rain, and I ought to be able to track the critter if I ever could. But after he struck this path, back here a piece, I can't find a sign of a hoof-print."

"Was he shod?" Webb asked, thoroughly interested in the misfortune of his neighbor.

"He had old shoes on, the corks 'bout gone. He was sort of run down with the spring and summer work, you know, so I thought t'other day I'd turn him out for a week or so. But, as I told my wife, I'd no idea the critter'd got life enough left to try to get out of the pastur'. But he's gone and done it. And it's queer he didn't make straight for the barn. I didn't s'pose he'd go out of sight of that if he had the whole county to range in."

Jim Rice had a genuine countryman's prolixity in the narration of his tale. It occurs to us now, that country people are seldom in so great a rush in anything they do as even the most indolent of our city residents appear to be.

"I've seen nothing of your horse, Jim—nor his tracks either," Jason declared. "Maybe," he added, "he's got into some confounded place he can't get out of. Pretty rough in some places along the side of the mountain here."

"I'd thought of that. Like enough he's broke a leg, or his neck. Hope it's his neck if either, save killing the beast," said Rice, philosophically. He looked askance at Mr. Temple, who had occupied himself with looking along the path for horse-tracks.

"*He* seen that 'ere light, has he?" the man asked in a

whisper, which was as plainly audible to Philip as it was to Jason.

"Yes, both of us did, last night," the other replied.

"Try to find out anything, did ye?"

"We tried a little."

"What did ye make out?"

"Got my lantern broke, and a good rap on my head, that laid me out straighter'n a string for a few minutes."

"You don't say!" If possible Jim Rice's eyes became fully a size larger, and he glanced somewhat apprehensively over his shoulder.

"How did you git out of the scrape?" he eagerly questioned.

"Mr. Temple was with me, and he helped me back here to the path. Then we went home."

"And what does *he* think on't? Or don't he say? He don't look likely to be scare't at his shadder. Looks pretty shrewd, I say."

This was spoken so loud that Philip accepted it as an undoubted compliment. He came toward them: he had something in his hand.

"Here's a horse-shoe, which I found yonder," he said.

Rice took it, examined it critically, and then exclaimed:

"That came off my horse's left fore-foot, sure's I live. There's where I filed it, t'other day, 'cause it got wore so one-sided. You've got sharp eyes, mister, if it isn't rude to say it."

"The shoe lay upon a flat rock. There were no tracks near it. Possibly your horse has taken wings. I can't account for the absence of tracks in any other way," Temple said.

"I've seen a horse-*fly*," Jim Rice declared, with a shrewd wink at Jason, and a strong emphasis upon the last word of the compound. The laugh with which he greeted his own wit would have betrayed the joke, even if it had not been too time-honored to create surprise on the part of Philip.

"Excuse my joke—Jarson knows I'm always poking

fun," said the man, apologetically. At the same time he suddenly sobered. "Yonder comes somebody—she's beckoning to—you, Mr. Temple!" he exclaimed.

Philip looked in the direction indicated, and saw Tracy Boynton a short distance down the path. She was beckoning to him, as Jim Rice had said.

CHAPTER XIII.

FANCY'S FOND SUGGESTION.

"My soul to fancy's fond suggestion yields,
And roams romantic o'er her airy fields."

—*Byron.*

As Philip advanced he saw that Mrs. Boynton was not alone. Lou Wentworth had stepped out of the path to gather a tuft of peculiar moss which had caught her eye.

"What has happened?" he asked, a trifle alarmed, for Tracy's countenance was somewhat pale.

"Nothing serious—to me, at least," she replied, with a reassuring smile. "But an accident happened to Mr. Stacy, a member of the fishing-party with whom Chester went yesterday," she continued.

"An accident—serious?" Philip asked.

"Rather, to him. It might have been to them all. They went with a team, you remember—there were four of them. The place is some ten miles from here, and over a rough, somewhat lonely road. As they were starting upon their return, their horse had a fit, or something, and ran them over an embankment. They were all considerably bruised, except Chester. He is *always* fortunate, and escaped without a scratch. And Mr. Stacy broke a leg, and was carried to a house near by. It is a lonely place, and only an old man and a lame boy live there. So Chester stayed at the house with Stacy, while the others took the man's horse and came on to the village for the doctor, and thence to the hotel. Chester sent word that he should stop with Stacy for a few days, and for you and me to come and keep him company. He says it would be shabby to leave Mr. Stacy among total strangers—they say, you know, that he hasn't a living relation in the world—and that we can amuse ourselves there for a few days as well as here. It will be genuine rusticating, you see."

Mrs. Boynton told her story rapidly, and uninterruptedly.

"And Mr. Boynton sent for *me* to come?" Philip questioned.

"Yes—he was very particular about that. So you see he *has* taken a fancy to you, after all! You will go?"

"Of course. I shall not refuse to act the good Samaritan. And when do we start?"

"Right away, or as soon as we can get ready. It won't make any difference with the Webbs, will it?"

"I think not. I've paid a week's board in advance, so they'll be nothing out of pocket, at any rate." He hesitated, and then laughed.

"But this is rather a sudden change of base," he exclaimed. "Such changes are always coming to me, and they doubtless always will. I'm the son of mystery and romance."

He went back to acquaint his host of his new plans, and then returned to the ladies.

"I will go to the cottage to make a few preparations," he said.

"We will call for you as we come along," Lou declared. "And mind," she said, shaking her forefinger in solemn emphasis, "if you are not ready when we come along we shall go on and leave you."

"And who, pray, are 'we'?" Philip questioned.

"Roy Blanchard and Lou are to go with us, of course," Tracy replied.

"I shall be ready and waiting for you long before you arrive," said Temple, raising his hat and turning away.

"We'll investigate this mystery in a few days—I won't abandon it, you may be sure," he said to Jason, as he passed the latter, who was still discussing with Rice the subject of the missing horse.

Philip made his preparations for departure with a zest that was strangely keen. The depression under which he had labored the night before had entirely disappeared; and when the open beach-wagon, containing Roy, Lou

and Mrs. Boynton appeared, he had been impatiently waiting for half an hour.

To drive over a country road upon a cool, moist morning, with the sunshine, sylvan shade and bird-melody all around, is to enjoy life in all its sweetness and beauty. And when charming, vivacious company is added, what more can be desired?

The horse was a great, clumsy animal, with limbs like small logs of wood, and nearly as stiff, and they lumbered over the crooked road at a monotonously measured pace. Roy applied the whip, and used all the persuasive eloquence at his command, in the hope to induce a little quicker pace upon the level portions of the road.

But language and whip were alike unappreciated by the beast.

"It is no use—it will be broad noon before we shall get to our destination," Roy exclaimed, in despair.

"Chester will think we've wandered from the right road," Tracy remarked.

"Or that we're not coming at all," suggested Lou. And yet it was plain that she was not very unhappy, for she had insisted upon sitting with Roy on the front seat, and her face was fairly radiant with pleasure.

Philip sat in silence, occasionally glancing into the face of Mrs Boynton It was very pleasant to have her so near him, and he permitted himself to indulge in the contemplation of fanciful impossibilities. Had he not come into a new existence, which was to permit him to remain always by the side of this, the only woman he ever loved?

If it should only turn out, in some impossible way, that she were Tracy Sherman still, and that they were lovers, living in a dream, as of old!

He gazed idly at the green trees and rocky pastures as they passed them, and permitted his fancies to run riot. All the while Lou and Roy were chatting, exchanging flashes of wit. Yet he could not have told a word spoken by either of them. Their speech was as

meaningless as the twitter of birds and murmur of brooks. The earlier absurd fancies passed, and unconsciously others took their place. What if Tracy *were* Chester Boynton's wife? Could *they* not be lovers still? Marriage is a thing of earth; love is from heaven. Shall the lower triumph over, and crush out, the higher? Can any laws of man's making confine, or circumscribe the higher, sweeter laws of God? Can he not love Tracy Boynton, if he wills it—and may she not love him, if her heart so prompts? Would not her marriage to Chester Boynton be the error of which she is guilty, rather than in obeying the truer, but later promptings of her heart? Somehow, Philip constantly thought of them as unhappy together. He could not analyze his conviction; yet it was none the less strong. It was not a wise match. They were unsuited to each other. She was imaginative, artistic, vivacious, impulsive. Mr. Boynton was practical, analytical, cool, and lacking in those finer perceptions that characterized his beautiful wife. It was an unwise choice in both; both were unhappy, and their discontent would increase as the years passed. How monstrous that Tracy should be unhappy all her life time with this man, when *he* could have rendered her existence one long, sweet dream.

All this, and much more flitted through the brain of Philip Temple. It is doubtful if he realized the true character of his own reflections. Perhaps he only indulged them, as we are all too prone to indulge wild, wanton fancies—without thinking that they were dangerous, like the delicious intoxications of Lasheesh. We believe that the true secret of living uprightly lies in the habit of control and training of one's own imagination. Men *think* of wrong doing—permit their idle thoughts to linger upon sinful possibilities which they have no thought of ever realizing, and thus is the soul's integrity lost. The temptation comes; the dream becomes a reality; and at last the world knows what God has known all

along—that he who was thought to be good, was really evil.

Once or twice Tracy spoke, and then Philip responded, and idle remarks were exchanged. Yet these did not interrupt the train of his own reflections. They ran on and on, unmindful of time and distance.

But he was aroused at last—in a rather startling manner. The vehicle came abruptly to a halt, and Roy Blanchard spoke.

"I'm going to find out where we are before we go another yard!" he exclaimed.

They were at a narrow point of the road, and before them lay a steep hill. In truth, the way had constantly grown more hilly, and the road less frequented in appearance as they proceeded.

But here was a house. A small, wood-colored dwelling, with a big barn close by, and a flock of turkeys chattering and gobbling in the yard.

"On the wrong road, are we?" Philip exclaimed, aroused from his reverie.

Mrs. Boynton started, and glanced at him in a half bewildered fashion. Of what had *she* been thinking? he asked himself.

"We've been on the road for about three hours," Roy declared, deliberately alighting from the vehicle.

"It is now nearly one o'clock p. m.," he added, glancing at his watch, "and we ought to have walked the distance in two hours."

"I *know* we're lost!" Lou exclaimed, in ludicrous dismay. Her blue eyes looked from face to face of her companions.

"We shall have a delightful time finding each other, at any rate," laughed Roy.

"What I'm thinking of," he continued, "is the possibility of losing my dinner This country style of eating has got me in a terrible condition, and if I don't have dinner promptly at twelve meridian I feel as though I was friendless, as it were.

"There are lots of blueberries beside the road," Lou declared, as though she were figuring upon the possibility of their being compelled to subsist upon this diminutive fruit for an indefinite length of time.

"Horse-chestnuts, too,—only they're not ripe," Mrs. Boynton demurely suggested.

"They aren't good to eat, are they?" Lou seriously returned.

"They are good for horses, I suppose. At least, it is said they used to grind the nuts for them, years ago." This piece of information came from Philip.

At this moment they espied a man in shirt-sleeves coming down from the barn.

Roy greeted him with something of a flourish.

"This is not Mr. Gridley—is it?" he questioned, deferentially.

"Hope not," the man retorted, with some vehemence.

"D'ye think I looked like him?" he demanded, with a grimace; "'cause if you did, I'd go straight and shoot myself, sure's I live."

It was evident that Roy's suggestion was taken as an insult by the man in shirt-sleeves. Gridley was the name of the one to whose dwelling the unfortunate Stacy was taken, and hence it was his dwelling of which our friends were in quest.

"I beg your pardon," Roy hastened to say, "I never saw Mr. Gridley, and consequently could not have mistaken you for him. But it is his house which we wish to find. I infer that you know where he lives?"

The man laughed loudly, slapping his knees with his hands in the excessiveness of his mirth.

"Why, man!" he exclaimed, controling himself, "you ain't within eight mild of Gridley's! Ho, ho! This here ain't the right road, and you're headed in the wrong direction."

Roy and Lou, and Philip and Tracy looked at each other in consternation.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STREAM OF DESTINY.

"But who can turn the stream of destiny?"

—*Spenser.*

"We're *almost* as far from our destination as we were when we started," Miss Wentworth exclaimed, breaking the dismayed pause.

"And no prospect of dinner," supplemented Roy, feebly.

"Perhaps this man 'puts up' in such an emergency as this," Philip suggested, but not audibly to the possible host.

"Are we sure that it would not be a greater misfortune to us if he should consent to feed us, than if he refused?" Tracy inquired, glancing critically at the man's shirt-sleeves, which were not of the whitest. The object of this discussion slouched nearer, evidently suspicious that he was entitled to know what they were saying.

"How far are we from the hotel on the mountain—the Vinton Retreat, as it is called?" Roy questioned.

"From there, be ye?" the man returned, eyeing them with new interest.

"City boarders, eh?" he added.

"Yes."

"Lot of 'em stopping there, I hear. The man that runs the place, Caleb Vinton, lived in the house yonder when he was a boy. Now he's rich—made his money off city chaps like you, I expect." There was unmistakable spite in this declaration. There was a pause. "You wanted to know how fur 'tis from here to Vinton's?" he said, as though it had but just occurred to him that he had been asked a question.

"I had some curiosity to know how far we had traveled," Roy replied.

"Fifteen mild, *I* call it. Some say it's sixteen That

hoss'll never take you back there 'thout resting up a bit. Pretty good load, four on ye, though the wimmen are light, I should say. Married folks, be ye?"

"Yes." Roy uttered the falsehood with a brazen face, and refused to see the energetic pantomime of Lou Wentworth, or her furious frowns.

"I don't see but we shall have to ask you to accommodate us with a lunch, and a little feed for our horse, Mr. ——I forget your name?"

"Massy sakes!—I couldn't do it—my woman, you know—not prepared—bate yer horse, but—"

The man's remonstrance was all dashes, and he began stepping about as though excessively flustered.

But with an assumption of deafness, Roy turned to the wagon and reached up his arms to assist Lou to alight.

"He says he can't accommodate us," she exclaimed, drawing back.

"He'll think better of it when Mr. Temple and I show our pocket-books," Roy replied, with provoking gravity. Philip had alighted, and was assisting Tracy to do so. Therefore Lou had to drown her scruples and yield to the inevitable.

The farmer, seeing there was no escape, hastened toward the house to warn his "woman"—for some reason countrymen of his stamp seem to have a stubborn antipathy to the term wife, when speaking of their better-halves. We wonder why?

Roy led the horse toward the big barn before alluded to. Philip followed the vehicle, intent upon rendering assistance in putting up the horse. Tracy and Lou moved with faltering steps toward the house.

Mr. Skelton, which proved later to be the name of their involuntary host, presently appeared, and hustled toward them.

"Go right into the house," he exclaimed, hospitably. "My woman'll see to ye. Make yourselves to home. We're poor folks, and don't often have a chance to enter

tain grand people, but we'll do the best we can. My woman says you'll have to put up with the best we've got, and call it good enough."

They complied with his invitation without hesitation. At the door they were met by a stout, red-faced woman, whose eyes were small and blinked very rapidly, as though she were afraid of getting dust into them. Her hair was in a "pug," and decidedly frowzy about her forehead; and the calico gown which she wore was faded to a most uncertain hue and figure.

Tracy and Lou were ushered into a meagerly furnished room, which, however, was evidently the best in the house. The walls were adorned by colored lithographs in square frames; and the apartment was pervaded by a musty odor, as though it were kept closed to air and sunlight except upon special occasions, like the present.

Mrs. Skelton rather hastily disposed of shade-hats and wraps, and then precipitately tumbled photograph albums and stereoscopic views into the laps of her guests.

"You can be lookin' them over while I'm gettin' dinner," she declared, and in another moment, like a mist, she had vanished.

It turned out that, in stopping at this house for entertainment, they had not been wholly unfortunate. The dinner, promiscuously served though it was, was abundant and wholesome.

"Treat ye rather better at this time of year than if you'd come in on us sudden in dead of winter," Mr. Skelton declared at the well-spread table, after his "woman" had made the customary excuses. "Plenty of green sass in the garden helps along when a body don't live nigh a village and market. My woman and I 'bout live on't from the time it comes along till the frosts come."

The guests keenly enjoyed the novelty of the situation. The Skeltons, who had only been informed of Phillip's and Roy's names, addressed Tracy and Lou as Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Blanchard, which error could only be

explained by declaring the falsity of Roy's declaration.

After all, what did it matter? "It is as it should be!" Philip reflected. He sat beside Mrs. Boynton at the table. The fancies which he had indulged during the long ride hither were resumed, although he frequently took part in the conversation. He glanced at Tracy more than once; and marked, with a thrill, that her pallor which he had noticed in the morning had disappeared.

Her face was daintily flushed now; there was a new, happy light in her eyes; and her laughter was sweeter and more joyous than ever before—it seemed.

The evidence of her pleasure acted upon Philip Temple's senses like the stimulus of new wine.

In the meanwhile a plan of procedure had been agreed upon. Mr. Skelton had volunteered to drive Roy and Lou back to the hotel with his team, while Philip and Tracy were to go on to Gridley's with the horse which had brought them hither.

"We can keep along together till we get to the road where you turn off," Skelton declared. "From there it'll be a straight road, so you can't miss your way."

This was addressed to Philip and Tracy.

"If *you* should miss your way, what would Mr.—"

Lou's remark was cut short by a look from Roy.

"Don't betray my duplicity at this late hour by mentioning that she is going to see her husband," he whispered, audibly only to Lou. "For, he added, "they'll think then she has two husbands—mormonism reversed!"

A deeper hue had mantled Mrs. Boynton's face. Philip noticed that all she said, and her every action, were seemingly mechanical, as though her thoughts were deeply absorbed.

It was well into the afternoon before they were once more upon the road.

Mr. Skelton, with Roy and Lou led the way, with the open buggy and white horse belonging to the farmer.

They reached the road which branched from the main highway, and where the two teams must separate.

"Keep straight ahead," Skelton called back, as they halted for a moment at the junction of roads. "It ain't more'n five mild furder, mostly up-hill, though, git there by sundown. Remember, a red house with yellow blinds. Only one like it within ten mild, so ye can't miss it, onless ye shut your eyes. G'lang Sam!" The latter to the white horse; and with the silvery adieu of Lou and Tracy sounding upon the sweet, still air, the two vehicles separated. And even the sound of the receding clatter of Skelton's buggy soon died away as Philip and his companion went further upon their divergent course.

The first mile was passed in silence. Philip seemed occupied with driving; while Tracy watched the trees, and fields as they flitted by. It was a perfect day. The heat of the sun was tempered by a gentle, yet cool breeze from the northwest. There was a hum of insects in the air; the trees rustled and nodded as they passed; birds twittered and sang, in the same happy way which has been theirs for thousands of years.

Tracy was first to speak.

"I fear Chester will be concerned about us," she said.

There was a nervous tremor in her sweet tones; yet the dainty tints upon her cheeks, and the happy light in her eyes had not disappeared.

"So you were thinking of him?" Philip questioned.

The words were prompted by a sudden, jealous pang.

"It is time he was thought of, isn't it?"

He did not answer at once, and she added:

"To tell the truth, I have scarcely thought, until this moment, that he must greatly wonder at our non-appearance. I doubt not that he is worrying."

"Then you have not been reflecting upon Mr. Boynton's possible misery during your long silence?" Philip persisted.

There was an eagerness in his tones that caused her to ook at him quickly.

"Why do you ask that?" she returned, again averting her face.

"Because I noticed that you have seemed in profound thought all the while."

"My thoughts have not been so profound as they appear, perhaps," she replied.

"They were certainly absorbing in their nature—like mine."

"Like yours?"

She glanced at him quickly again, coloring.

"Yes, like mine," he persisted. They were at the base of a long, steep hill, which the horse began to ascend with slow reluctance. There was a small stream at this point, spanned by a narrow bridge. The brook was swollen in volume from the recent rains, and a small, level tract of land upon each side of the road was flooded. A little later this fact was recalled by Philip with significance; but now his attention was absorbed by other thoughts.

"Then you have been in a reverie?" she asked, curiously.

"Yes, ever since we started this morning. It was more of a dream than a reverie, however, for it was full of strange, impossible fancies."

The horse moved very slowly up the slope. But neither of them noticed the fact. Tracy's solicitude for her husband's ease of mind seemed to have been forgotten. Or perhaps it did not occur to her that a better speed was possible.

"Aren't we too mature to indulge fancies which are impossible of fulfillment?" Tracy questioned.

"I suppose we are. But we are never satisfied with anything short of the goal we have hoped and prayed for."

"Then you have been thinking of unfulfilled hopes?"

"Yes. And you?"

She felt that he was looking at her now, and the consciousness of his scrutiny caused her eyes to droop.

"None of us can expect the full fruition of our

hopes," sne said. Her voice was very low; there was a trace of suppressed emotion in its tones.

"Why not?" he returned. She did not speak. A thrush by the roadside broke in with its sweet song. A moment later he asked again:

"Why not—so far as this life is concerned, I mean?" he exclaimed.

"I do not understand your meaning, I think."

"I mean, that everything in the world is ours. If we are not successful in life, it is by our faults, or indolence. If we were only unfailing in judgment, we might win all that we strive for. It is our errors that cost us the fruition of our hopes. All things are possible when we begin; it is our mistakes that make them impossible."

"That is true," she said.

"Then why may we not expect what we may attain?" he continued.

"We are not begining life now," she replied.

He made an impatient gesture.

"That is true with me—I have never begun to live," he exclaimed, his voice low with suppressed feeling.

"You haven't begun?"

She looked straight into his face as she asked this. The expression there startled her, and again she fixed her gaze upon the distant landscape.

"No, I have not begun to live," he persisted, in the same low, passionate tones. "I thought I had done so once—five years ago. But it was a false beginning. Fate interposed, and all I had gained worth living for was snatched away."

There was an interval of silence. Philip's pulses beat tumultuously. Why was he saying this to Tracy Boynton, he asked himself. He did not desire her sympathy in a misfortune of which she had been the cause. He did not wish her to apologize for marrying Chester Boynton instead of himself. Such expression from her would have offended him, rather than otherwise.

Then why did he speak thus? Was it to test her? to see if *she* had regrets?

He half expected an indignant response from her. He had said what he had no right to say under the circumstances, and she should have rebuked him for doing so. Yet she did not. She was silent for several moments—suspenseful moments to him.

Then she said, speaking slowly:

"Perhaps fate was more kind to you than—"

He hastened to fill the pause.

"Than to you?" he breathlessly exclaimed.

She faced him then, mingled pain, rebuke, pleading, expressed in her eyes, and upon her quivering lips.

"You have no right to say that!" she cried. She seemed on the point of saying more, but repressed the impulse.

They were at the top of the hill. Before them lay a steep descent. Philip, involuntarily glancing down the slope, and uttered an ejaculation of dismay.

CHAPTER XV.

A THOUSAND FEARS.

"She 'gan to cast in her misdoubtful mind
A thousand feares!"

—*Spenser.*

The highway, wherever the slopes were steep, had been badly gullied by the rains. The rain of the previous night, succeeding that of the day and night before, had aggregated a remarkably heavy fall.

But it was not the prominent pebbles and gullies which caused Philip Temple to draw the horse to a halt upon the brow of the hill, and utter that exclamation of dismay.

Below lay a broad meadow, which was now overflowed as far as it was visible to the eye. And at the base of the hill a river crossed under the road. There had been, or ought to have been, a bridge, but none was there. The stone abutments were there. There were a few timbers, held in place doubtless by strong spikes. But between the abutments, dividing the road, yawned a broad chasm, through which hurried the black river, risen almost to the level of the road itself.

There was no mistaking the situation. The bridge had been carried away since it was crossed by Boynton's companions the night before. To cross now were an utter impossibility.

"Why do you stop?" Tracy demanded. She had not noticed the barrier at the foot of the hill.

"Look below," Temple replied, pointing toward the bridgeless river.

"The bridge—washed away!" she cried.

"Evidently."

"But how are we to cross?"

"That is a problem which I would like to be spared the responsibility of solving."

"We *must* cross—in some way. *We must!*"

Her utterance seemed prompted by an impulse akin to apprehension.

Philip experienced a sense of contrition. He realized that his recent language had been equivocal; that it may have been interpreted by his companion to have meant more than he had intended. And in consequence she was now half afraid of him. He had, in a measure, forfeited her confidence.

The realization cost him a keen pang. How could he prove to her that he held her honor, the purity of her soul, dearer than his own life? There were no terms in which he could fitly express his feeling. He could only strive to regain what he had lost by falling back upon the genuine chivalrous frankness of his nature.

There is nothing so efficacious for dispelling faint distrust as a change of tone, from seriousness, with its danger, to humor. There is a relief in the change, too, which is helpful to both.

"We must cross, Mr. Temple," Tracy reiterated, as her companion hesitated.

He looked at her and smiled. "So we must," he replied. "But," he added, his smile broadening, "we shall have to swim to do so! There's no other possible way, because the chasm is too broad to leap across."

She compressed her lips; then covered her face with her hands.

"Oh! what shall we do?" she cried. She almost sobbed the appeal.

Philip started the horse, and they slowly descended the hill. It was necessary to go slowly, because, at that point, the highway was washed more dangerously than at any other over which they had passed.

They reached the base of the slope; they once more halted, this time close to the brink. The horse, sober animal though he was, snorted and put back his ears at sight of the black, eddying current, and its swishing sound as it chafed its narrow bounds.

"It looks as though they were going to begin repairs at once," Philip remarked, as he glanced across the stream. For there, piled near the opening, was a load of plank, and several heavy timbers. They were all new; they had been placed there since the rain.

"But there is no one at work upon it," Tracy returned.

"They have probably gone back for more lumber."

"There is no telling when they may return."

"I suppose not. But it is evident that this is an important road, and doubtless a temporary bridge will be immediately built. If the workmen were only here it wouldn't take them long to fix it so that we could get across, horse and all. The animal is trusty, and would cross a pretty shaky affair with a man at his head."

They were silent a moment. Then Philip alighted and went to the edge of the bank. Then he listened.

"I believe I can hear wagon coming now," he declared.

"If they would only place a plank across, I would go over on that, and walk the rest of the distance," Tracy returned, with feverish eagerness.

"You could not do that alone," he replied.

"Why not?"

"It would not be prudent, upon this lonely road. We can do no better than to wait. If no one comes to fix the bridge we will go back to the house which we passed a while ago."

"We might return to the hotel. That would be better than to stop at a strange house."

"Better, if we could get there. But this horse is pretty jaded already. It is seven or eight miles to the Retreat, and even if the horse could traverse the distance, we should go so slowly that it would be long after nightfall when we should arrive. That is out of the question."

She was silent again. Her distress could not be concealed. Up to the present she had evinced no eagerness to reach their destination. But of a sudden, upon

discovery of the barrier to their progress, she seemed to have grown intensely, painfully anxious.

"Why don't they come?" she impatiently exclaimed, after another brief silent interval.

Temple was still listening. Again he caught a faint rumble, as of an approaching heavy wagon. But it ceased again, and he half feared it was all but a freak of his own imagination.

He glanced upward at the sky. It was clear and serene. At least, there was no danger of the additional discomfort of a sudden storm assailing them.

"Do you hear it?" Tracy asked, watching his face furtively.

"I did, a moment ago."

"Isn't it upon another road!"

"There is none near enough for the sound to reach us."

"It may not have been a wagon that you heard."

He laughed, to cheer her from the strained anxiety into which she was sinking more deeply ever moment.

"Don't be so hopeless," he implored. "This isn't the worst of all possible situations. Suppose it had happened upon a sultry day, and a thunder storm came upon us? Or, what if we were twenty miles from human habitation; or there were wolves and bears to attack us; or savages concealed behind yonder trees, coveting our scalps?"

She shivered, and then laughed, in a nervous, hysterical way.

"Don't speak of those dreadful possibilities," she cried.

"I will not. I was only drawing a dark picture, that you might look upon our situation less woefully. We're not very badly off. We can go to a house in twenty minutes."

"But Chester—he will worry. It is of him that I'm thinking."

"He may not worry at all. He will suppose that four of us started together, if we started at all; and if we do not arrive he will know that something detained us. If it was anything serious he will expect to be informed. If

you were ill, or injured, word would be gotten to him somehow. You say he is cool and practical. What would concern you will not disturb him. He will laugh at our adventure when he comes to hear of it. We can laugh at it now. In fact, there doesn't seem to be anything for us to do except to laugh."

Mrs. Boynton seemed somewhat relieved by her companion's cheerfulness. It might have been his lightness of demeanor, which most relieved her anxiety, however. It dispelled that sense of vague, nameless danger which his words inspired a short time before.

The sun was sinking toward the horizon. Already long shadows were creeping across the road, growing longer and darker as the moments passed.

At last Philip spoke again.

"We had better go back," he said.

"Whither?"

"To the house which we passed."

"And give up crossing to-night?"

"Yes."

"What if the people should refuse to keep us over night?"

"They would not turn us out doors."

"But we know nothing of their character.

"And they know nothing of ours—so we shall be even on that score."

He began backing the horse around. As he did so, Tracy exclaimed:

"Hark!"

They listened.

This time there was no mistaking it. A wagon was approaching—a heavy loaded wagon, as was indicated by the slow, ponderous rumble.

"It is coming this time, sure," they exclaimed in a breath. In another moment the wagon came into view, and drew up upon the opposite side of the chasm.

It was drawn by a yoke of oxen—hence the slowness of

its approach. It was loaded with timber for the bridge, and half a dozen men accompanied it.

The men flung off their coats and began deliberately to unload.

"Halloo!" shouted Philip, approaching the banks of the stream.

The men heard his shout; one of them came forward; a tall, raw-boned man, with bushy, red whiskers.

"What yer want?" he demanded, staring at the young man, as though the latter were a curious animal escaped from a menagerie.

"We want to get across," Temple replied.

"Why don't ye, then?" the other retorted, with insolent humor.

"I have a lady with me," Philip explained, with unrelaxed dignity of demeanor, "and it is imperative that she should cross. If you are going to build a temporary bridge, we will wait. If not, we will make some other arrangement."

There was a space of silence. The men had all ceased work. Some of them were exchanging comments in an undertone.

"What do you say?" Philip demanded, impatiently.

"You can wait," the man replied.

"Are you going to build a bridge to-night?"

"We're goin' to try."

"How long will it take you to get it so that I can lead my horse over?"

"Stiddy?"

"Yes."

"'N hour or so. Twon't take long, I guess. We was goin' to build a bridge that would *stay*, bet'wixt this and to-morrow mornin'. This 'ere town don't build temporary 'fairs. Got sick of it. We'll work all night, and by daylight there'll be a bridge here that you could drive a steam engine over. Twon't take long to rig up suthin' so's you can git acrost."

The other men had resumed work, with some show of

alacrity. Timbers were thrown across the chasm, and spiked into place. All the while the bushy whiskered man kept talking.

"Don't pay to put up no temporary bridges," he declared, as though in response to an assertion that it *did* pay.

"A temporary bridge has got to be safe; and you might as well make it a good one while you're about it. This road has got to be used every day. Main turnpike, you see. If this bridge wa'n't built before to-morrow night the devil would be to pay. Beggin' the lady's pardon for what may sound like swearin'!"

He need not have apologized, for Mrs. Boynton did not hear the "swearin'" nor any other part of his remarks, except so far as they concerned their immediate needs.

The sun sank behind the hills. Twilight was settling upon the scene, and the river, creeping with such swift stealth between its narrow bounds, had grown inky in its blackness.

The shadows were now black, also; and the forms of the men busy upon the bridge, grew grotesque to the vision.

Lanterns were lighted, to enable them to go on with their work; and gradually the white moonlight made itself visble, casting a strange witchery over the scene.

Tracy alighted from the vehicle, and walked to and fro with her companion, watching the men at their work, the twinkling lights, the prismatic reflections upon the water's surface, the white, changeful moonlight, the wavering shadows.

But very few words passed between them.

The scene was strangely bewitching; a scene, and the associations of which, was to linger in their memories with peculiar vividness. They little thought how bitter that memory was to become.

Philip's fancies were again stimulated; but he did not indulge them as he had done before.

"I was mistaken in her, after all!" he reflected. "She loves her husband better than I thought. And yet—"

He recalled her hesitancy; her failure to resent promptly what he had said; her failure to declare, with warmth, that the fruition of *her* hopes had come to her as the wife of the man she loved. She had not said that. Her manner and responses were vaguely equivocal. The question yet remained unanswered. There was still cause to suspect that she was unhappy—disappointed. That she, too, had indulged vain regrets.

The process of reasoning was simple, and everything seemed to conspire toward a flattering conclusion—flattering to the dreams which Philip had been indulging. The moonlight, with its witching influence; the presence of Tracy, stimulating his love for her. For Temple, in his own heart, had many times confessed that he did love Tracy Boynton, as he had loved Tracy Sherman. How could it be otherwise, he reasoned, when he had loved her before her marriage, unless his heart were fickle? He admitted that he had no right to evince his regard; but what law could root out the deepest impulses his heart had ever known?

"Might come over now if you're in a hurry," announced one of the laborers, breaking in upon his reflections.

"How quickly they have done the work," Tracy exclaimed.

Philip glanced at his watch. The hour was nine o'clock. They had been at work nearly two hours upon the structure. Yet to Tracy the time had seemed short—a fact that proved still more conclusively that Philip's fancies were not without foundation. At least, his society was agreeable to her; for together the time flew swiftly, as it does upon the wings of love.

The horse and vehicle were led across the incomplete structure; Temple and his companion again mounted the seat; and a little later they drew up before a red house, with yellow blinds.

At the door Mrs. Boynton was met by her husband. He held a lamp in one hand; and by its dull glow she saw a fierce frown upon his countenance, such as she had never seen there before.

"So you have come at last?" he exclaimed, in a tone that was almost harsh in its coldness.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHESTER'S GREETING.

"Every sullen frown and bitter scorn
But fanned the fuel that too fast did burn."
—*Dryden.*

To Chester Boynton's greeting his wife made no response. He turned to enter, and she mutely followed. She was led to a large, low-ceiled chamber, whose meager furnishings and general dinginess bespoke the poverty of their host.

Chester ushered her into the room, and then followed, closing the door behind them. She faced him then; her cheeks were pale; her glance matching his in coldness.

"Yes, I have come," she then said, her voice trembling with half-repressed indignation.

"I had about given you up," he returned, with a slight smile which was more offending to her sensitive nature than his frown had been.

"Then you had *some* hope of seeing me again?" she asked, with fine scorn.

"Very little, I confess. I see Mr. Blanchard and Miss Wentworth did not accompany you. Was it by their unwillingness or yours that they did not do so?"

"They were willing."

The reply was slowly uttered. And no other explanation was vouchsafed. Mrs. Boynton saw the truth. Chester had already convicted her, in his heart, of a wrong which she believed herself incapable of committing. Never before had she suspected that her husband were capable of jealousy. But it was plain that this worst of all passions had been excited within him; that it had stung him to injustice.

Tracy's sense of the wrong done her was keen. While she had feared that her husband would be concerned at her non-appearance, he had in reality been conjuring wild, maddening suspicions against her. He had not

even asked if she had met with an accident; he had given her no opportunity for explanation; he had only greeted in her that cold way which had unmistakably betrayed his distrust.

The shock to the sensitive young wife was a bitter one. The sense of flagrant injustice shown filled her with intense indignation. He had asked for no explanation; she stood condemned beforehand; and, under the impulse of that moment of passion, she resolved to withhold from him the story of the day's mishaps.

"And you prevailed upon them not to obtrude?" he demanded, angered by the coolness of her responses.

"If it suits your mood to believe so, you are at liberty."

"Tracy, what do you mean?"

She sank breathlessly upon a chair; she had made no move toward removing her wraps.

"My meaning ought to be plain to you," she replied.

He was silent, and she added, hurriedly:

"You need not question me concerning the delay in my coming, because I shall not explain. You would not credit anything which I might say, in your present mood. Besides, I feel that I owe you no excuses. The insult conveyed in your tones and looks absolves me from whatever sense of duty to you I have hitherto entertained. Bear in mind that this experience of mine shall not soon be forgotten. The love that goes hand in hand with distrust is not the love I crave, or wish to retain!"

A bright flush had leaped into her face while she was speaking, relieving its pallor. Her voice was unsteady; it was almost shrill in the intensity of her indignation. Yet there was a cold courtesy in her words that rendered their sting the more keen and lasting, for they did not seem to be the utterance of an angry impulse.

Chester turned abruptly away, and seemed on the point of leaving her. But at the door he paused and looked back. He had set the lamp upon a table; and as he stood near the door his face was thrown into shadow.

"Have I not the right to demand an explanation?" he said, in a low, steady voice.

"You *had* the right," she replied.

"It is still mine."

"Yes, you have the right to demand." She paused, and then firmly added: "And I have the privilege of refusing."

The jealous husband flung up one hand with an angry gesture.

"You are my wife!" he cried, raising his voice.

"Unfortunately for us both, I am."

As he grew more excited in speech, hers became calmer. Upon that occasion, at least, she seemed the stronger character of the two.

"Then you regret your choice?" he demanded. He seemed determined to render their alienation too great to admit of reconciliation.

"I have not said so," she replied.

"You intimated it."

"Do you wish me say that I regret it?"

"If it is true, I had rather hear it from your lips than by other means."

"Why must I be cross-examined in this way? Why may I not demand a like declaration from you?"

"You have no reason to question the sincerity of my regard, Tracy."

"Haven't I? Are you quite sure? I haven't an enemy in the world who would insult me as you have done to-night. Is that the measure of your sincerity?"

She smiled as she said this, and her smile added to the scorn of her tone.

"How have I insulted you? I have said nothing that I had not reason to say. I sent for you to come this morning; and I was generous enough to ask your former —I will not say present—lover to come with you. You fail to come when I expect you; the friends who were to accompany you also fail to appear; and when you arrive, it is at a late hour, and in company with the one

whom I have good reason to suppose once possessed the warmest regard of your heart."

Mr. Boynton's speech was usually rather deliberate. But then it was rapid, and his whole demeanor seemed to have undergone a startling transformation.

Tracy rose to her feet, advanced a pace toward him, the color fleeing from her face and leaving it white as marble.

"Who told you that *he* was ever my—my lover?" she demanded, her tones husky with eagerness.

Chester smiled this time somewhat exultantly.

"I have friends who are unwilling to have me deceived," he answered.

"Who told you, Chester Boynton? *I demand to know!*"

"It is your turn to demand, it seems. It is mine to refuse. I am too grateful for my friend's warning to betray his or her personality."

She did not speak immediately and he continued:

"Let it suffice that the source of my information is trustworthy. And if it were not your looks at this moment would confirm it. You were once the betrothed wife of Philip Temple—or at least, he supposed you to be such. It was by a mere chance that you were separated. By a mere chance you are now brought together. Therefore, what had I reason to expect? Yet I believed that you really cared for me; that you had self-respect sufficient to silence or prevent gossip. But you have not done so. I accuse you of nothing worse than a show of sentiment toward a former lover. But your conduct, and the position into which you have allowed yourself to be drawn to-night is sufficient to tarnish your name and mine. Frankness upon your part might have brightened the shadow, and dispelled my suspicions, at least. But your refusal to explain leaves me to infer what I please."

Once more Tracy sank upon a chair. For a moment she covered her face with her hands, and he could see that her form shook with emotion.

Yet, when she again looked at him, it was plain that she had not been weeping.

"I was not aware before that I had enemies spying upon me," she exclaimed.

"You should not have hoped to keep the secret of your former relations with Philip Temple from my knowledge," Boynton returned.

"Had you asked me for my confidence in such matters I should not have withheld it."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"I did not ask for it. I trusted you fully."

"You trusted me, as a stranger not as a husband should do. Your confidence is upset by the first shadow."

"It is not a small shadow, Tracy. Remember, you refused, a moment ago, to explain."

"You asked for no explanation. You condemned me without one, as I have said."

There was a moment of silence. Then, in an altered tone, full of courteous coldness, Tracy asked:

"In our quarrel I have forgotten to inquire after your unfortunate friend, Mr. Stacy. Is he doing well?"

Chester compressed his lips. Never had his wife seemed so radiantly lovely as at this moment. He was assailed by a feeling that he had, perhaps, been too hasty, in his jealous frenzy. He was half impelled at this moment to seek her pardon; to take the first step toward reconciliation. But pride, and jealous pangs which still clung to him, withheld the spontaneous outpouring of his really generous nature. "I will wait, and see what comes of it all," he mentally decided. "I have reason to be suspicious; when she explains all, frankly as she ought, then I can acknowledge my error. It shall be according to *her* choice, not mine. She shall not be hampered by me."

Aloud, in reply to her question, he said:

"His limb was badly fractured, and I'm sorry to say

that he is doing far from well. The delay in getting a surgeon allowed some inflammation to set in, and there are symptoms of fever. He has no nurse that the doctor can trust, and for a few days, at least, I shall take care of him. I shall sit up with him to-night."

"I'm sorry he is so bad," Tracy returned. She was quietly removing her hat and Newmarket, standing before the small mirror that hung over the old-fashioned wash-stand. An observer at the moment would not have suspected that there was pain, jealousy, indignation burning within their hearts. Or that there had been a quarrel, such as ruin many lives had just been indulged.

"If you need my assistance, do not hesitate to call," she added, with a quiet sincerity which could not be mistaken. "I shall not need you to-night; to-morrow I may. And it is possible that Mr. Temple can relieve me to-morrow night."

He opened the door, but lingered for a moment upon the threshold, as though hoping something more might be said. But she did not again look at him. She went on arranging her hair before the glass.

And he wheeled quickly and left her alone, the door closing between them with a bang.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HEART OF WOMAN.

"Ah me! How weak a thing
The heart of woman is."
—*Julius Cæsar. Act. 2, Scene iv.*

Tracy did not see Philip, nor her husband, again that night.

A servant had been employed, at Stacy's expense, to assist Gridley's housekeeper. The house was ample in size, although its furnishings throughout were meager and out of date.

Gridley himself was a man of sixty five, and it was plain that he was of miserly disposition. Indeed he seemed to rejoice that Mr. Stacy's misfortune had brought him what he otherwise might have never obtained—several remunerative boarders.

To his son, who was a cripple, undersized and old-looking, the miser said upon every favorable opportunity:

"They're rich city folks, and let 'em pay well for what they git, might as well come into *our* pockets as anybody's, eh?"

The youth would nod and grin affimatively. Yet it was doubtful if a copper cent of the proceeds ever found a resting place in *his* pocket. Perhaps, however, he felt that he was a sharer in the old man's prosperity, in the latter's willingness to confide in him.

"We'll make a good thing off of 'em afore the young chap gits well," he would continue, rubbing the stumpy beard upon his chin with one yellow hand with measured emphasis.

"A bad break, the doctor says. Fever liable to set in. May be sick two months. That Boynton—generous chap, not a stingy hair about him—won't desert his friend. Wife—pretty's a picter—won't leave *him*. And Mr. Temple won't go while *she* stays. Clear enough that he

sets a heap by her, though she *is* another man's wife. None of our business long as they pay well—eh, Simon?"

Simon nodded and grinned again. This was his stereotyped way of assenting to everything. And then he hobbled away on his crutches, muttering to himself.

This was spoken early the next evening after the arrival of Philip and Tracy.

In the meanwhile Mr. Boynton had learned, in a casual remark on the part of Temple, of the destroyed bridge, and of the other delays which had caused them to be so long upon the road. But these explanations were not made to him. Philip supposed, then, that Tracy had explained to her husband, and therefore supposed that the details were not due from him.

Yet, at the table at dinner and breakfast he became vaguely conscious that there was trouble between husband and wife. Not until early evening did he have a chance to speak with Tracy alone, although they had spoken freely together before the others during the day.

The glow of another sunset rested upon the tree-tops, glinting the old house, filling the windows with flame. Philip stood under a tree at a short distance from the dwelling. He heard a light, quick step near him, and turning, saw Tracy approaching.

The day had been warmer than the previous one, and she had donned a dainty-figured lawn, that caused her to look more sweet and fairy-like than usual.

"I was looking for you," she said, as she came up. At the same time a slight flush of embarrassment came into her cheeks.

"Were you?" he returned, thrilled with pleasure.

"Why not? I have hardly seen you to-day. And—I have something I wish to tell you."

Her tone faltered a little as she said this. He looked at her in vague surprise.

"What is it? Something that troubles you?" he questioned.

"Have you spoken with Chester to-day?" she abruptly asked.

"Only casually."

"Then he has said nothing to you?"

"Nothing of special note. In fact, I imagined that he tried to avoid me. He asked if I would take care of Mr. Stacy to-night—that is all that I remember."

"I am glad he has said nothing more," she returned, with a sigh of relief.

Her words only excited his curiosity.

"What do you mean?" he questioned.

She did not answer. He drew nearer, and looked earnestly down into her face.

"You have quarrelled again?" he said, in a very low tone.

How did he know that they had *ever* quarreled? she asked herself.

"A little," she admitted, compressing her lips.

"I was not the cause, I hope?"

"No—not you, directly. He had no right to show you injustice. He was jealous—some one has been poisoning his mind against me. He knows that we were once—"

She hesitated, and he supplied, in a questioning tone:

"Lovers?"

The word was lightly uttered; but it sent a bright glow over her cheeks, rivaling that of the sunset.

"Yes," she answered.

"Some one told him!"

"Yes."

"Do you know whom?"

"No."

"And does he refuse to tell you?"

"He does."

There was a pause. Philip Temple's face clouded; there was a resentful flash in his blue eyes.

"This is infamous!" he cried vehemently.

She made no response, and he continued:

"So he is jealous of me! And was he—unkind?"

"Don't ask me!" she cried, appealingly.

There was another pause.

Then Philip said, decisively:

"I will go away."

"No, no!" she returned.

"Why not?"

"I wish you to stay. Mr. Stacy needs you. You shall not be driven away like this. It will do no good for you to go. Our quarrel cannot be healed in that way. You are my friend, and his unreasoning jealousy shall not separate us, or make us as strangers. We are blameless—are we not?"

She looked straight into his face as she asked the question. In a flash, he remembered the tenor of his fancies or dreams of the previous day. Was *he* blameless? The question came to him with accusing force But there was a plausible answer ready. It is so easy for us to practice self-deception. It is so easy to arrive at a verdict of self-acquittal, no matter how strong the evidence presented to our own consciousness.

"Yes, we are blameless," he answered, his voice shak ing. "No one can accuse us rightfully of an improper word or action. *I* may not be wholly innocent in one regard. I have allowed you to see that I have not forgotten the past; I have admitted that the love which I once had a right to avow had not been destroyed by the accidents of separation, and marriage. In letting you see this, I may have overstepped the bounds of propriety. But I could not have hidden the truth if I had attempted to do so, and perhaps frankness is better than unsuccessful concealment. If there is blame, as I say, it is mine."

Her eyes drooped; the color had again faded from her face.

"You are too generous," she said, almost inaudibly.

"How?"

"I, too, am open to blame."

"I do not understand?"

"It is better that we should misunderstand each other," she exclaimed, hastily.

The words thrilled him with a wild, overpowering conviction. What might he not infer from her remark?

He bent eagerly toward her; for an instant a question trembled upon his lips—a query prompted by his own overpowering love—yet, with strong self-control he suppressed it. If what he suspected *were* true, what right had he to take advantage of her confidence in him? Would there be aught gained if she were prevailed upon to admit that, if she were free, she would return his love? That she *did* return it even now?

In that moment of hesitation between passion and the generous, chivalrous instincts of his nature, Philip Temple realized that in such an admission from her, if it were true, only a greater torture would be entailed to them both. If it were true, it were treason to utter it. It were a thousand times better unspoken. He drew back quickly. She had not seen the look upon his face, and it was well that she did not.

"I will go away, Mrs. Boynton," he declared, with forced calmness. "It is better to remove all appearance of evil, and then your husband may regret his hasty judgment."

"I don't wish you to go," she persisted.

"I think it is wiser for us both."

"It may be wiser for you. But I am selfish. If you go Chester will think I told you to do so, that his suspicions might be allayed. He has been jealous without just cause. We will prove to him that our friendship is above reproach. My fair name is dear to me, as well as to him."

"It is dear to me also," Philip said, fervently.

"Then you will stay—for the present?"

"If it is best. I will stay until to-morrow—until I have time to think."

"You will stay—it *is* best," she insisted, so eagerly

that he could not have refused then, had he wished to do so.

They were silent again for a few moments. She turned to leave him, and then came back.

"One thing more," she said hesitatingly.

"Anything you may ask."

"Chester may speak to you—that is reproachfully."

"Yes."

"He may indulge in severe language, if he chance to give his passion rein."

"And if he should do so, how should you meet him?"

"Just as you may direct."

"Can you exercise self-control under strong provocation?"

"If need be."

"Then refuse to quarrel with him. Do not make retorts to his angry remarks. Do not exasperate him further than he is at the beginning."

"It shall be as you say, Mrs. Boynton. There shall be no quarrel betwixt your husband and me if I can avoid it. I will meet him with humility, or whatever may best assuage his anger."

"I can trust you, Mr. Temple. I wish he might comprehend how noble you are!"

She was moving away as she said this. He started to follow her, but suppressed the impulse, and returning to the tree, flung himself wearily upon the ground. He had scarcely done so before he heard a sound, as of some one hobbling toward him. Turning, he saw Simon Gridley advancing, as fast as his crutches would carry him.

The fellow was grinning, as was usual. He sank down to a crouching position, and fell to looking at Philip with furtive curiosity.

"'Spose he'll die?" the youth abruptly asked, in a thin, husky tone.

"Whom?" Temple returned.

"Mr. Stacy?"

"I hope not."

"Be you goin' to stay here till he gets well?"

"I dont't know."

"Stay 'slong as the Boyntons do, won't ye?"

"I think not."

"I should think you would."

"Why?"

"'Cause she's so han'some and sets so much by ye!"

The gathering shadows, fortunately, hid the burning flush which mantled the cheeks and brow of Philip at the blunt remark of the strange youth.

"What do you mean, you young simpleton?" Temple angrily exclaimed.

"Oh, nothin' much."

"Do you know, I've a mind to teach you better manners?" Philip wrathfully cried.

The youth recoiled, in some trepidation.

"Don't hurt me. I didn't mean nothin', I tell ye," he declared.

"Then see that you keep a civil tongue in your head in future.

The young man rose as he uttered this warning, and entered the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CALM DESPAIR.

"What words are these have fall'n from me!
Can calm despair and wild unrest
Be tenants of a single breast,
Or sorrow such a changeling be?"

—*In Memoriam.*

The two succeeding days were comparatively uneventful ones at the Gridley dwelling. The fears concerning Stacy's injury were realized. He was a very sick man, and required constant attention. The nurse procured at the village was inexperienced and inefficient, and Chester Boynton and Philip Temple shared almost equally in the superintendence and care of the unfortunate man.

Mrs. Boynton lent a hand also, in the gentle, quiet way which belongs to her sex. But between herself and Chester a tacit coldness continued.

That he knew the cause of delay upon the day of her arrival she was aware. Hence she felt that an apology for his hasty judgment was due both herself and Philip.

But no apology was made. He did not seem to be watching them; outwardly, no one could discern a trace of jealousy on the part of Mr. Boynton.

Philip and Tracy met at the table; and when her husband was at the bedside of the patient, they sometimes strolled out upon the lawn together, chatting in a light vein, and making no reference to her unhappiness, or to former days.

Upon the third morning Mr. Stacy was somewhat better, and Philip announced in the presence of Chester and Tracy his intention to return to the Webb cottage.

"I have been neglecting my own work too long already," he declared, "and it is time that I bestirred myself. For, you will remember, I am not simply idling away a summer vacation. I am gathering scraps and sketches of rural scenery, to use in my designs for engrav-

ing. Next month I am to illustrate several magazine serials, and I must have an abundance of fresh material in my sketch book to select from."

To this announcement Tracy made no response—at least, not then. Chester merely said:

"We shall miss you, of course. But you know best what you can do. The nurse and I can handle Stacy's case now, without over-taxing either of us."

Philip arranged to return the next morning.

Toward nightfall he saw Tracy walking leisurely out upon the road. She appeared to be on an aimless stroll; and it occurred to Philip that he might not again have an opportunity to speak with her before his departure. Hence, under an irresistible impulse he started out bent upon overtaking her.

When he reached the road she had disappeared beyond a curve, and he quickened his steps, fearing that he should miss the opportunity. Reaching a huge oak by the roadside, he came upon Tracy in the act of gathering a mass of golden rod, which grew plentifully in that spot. She did not notice his approach until he was at her side.

"So you came," she exclaimed, slowly facing about.

"Did you expect me to follow you?" he eagerly returned, strangely thrilled by her words and expression.

"I thought it was like you to follow," she replied.

He looked at her keenly. Was she ridiculing him? She had stopped breaking the long stems of golden rod; that which she had already gathered she permitted to fall to the ground.

"I did not iniend to intrude against your wishes," Philip gravely said. She was silent, and, with a vague sense of disappointment he turned away.

"Stay!" she exclaimed.

He faced about, and saw that she was smiling.

"I didn't tell you to go," she added.

"I inferred that you looked upon my following you as an intrusion."

"You had no right to infer anything of the kind. I

expected you to come, and I should have been disappointed if you had not."

This was sufficiently plain, and he was at her side in a moment.

"I thought I would bid you good-by before I went back," he said, his voice very low.

"We might have bid each other adieu at the house," she suggested.

"And you think it would have been the better way?"

"Perhaps. But I wished to say something more to you."

"What is it?"

She hesitated. Then she suddenly buried her face in her hands, giving vent to a burst of weeping which, evidently, she had restrained until this moment only by strong self-control.

The evidence of her anguish sent a yet keener pain to the heart of Philip Temple. He did not pause to consider the questionableness of the act. His sympathy and love gained, for the time, complete control, and he was in a mood to defy right or wrong. He drew nearer, and seized her hands in both his own, gently drawing them away from her face.

"Tracy!" he cried, in a low, passionate tone. "How long is this to continue? It is breaking my heart to see you suffer so, without the power of comforting or aiding you! It seems bitterly wrong that, when one is in trouble, one's truest friend may not bestow his sympathy and counsel unchecked."

She did not withdraw her hands from his strong, steady grasp. Her eyes, full of tears, looked up into his.

"What has he been saying to you?" he asked, after a moment of eloquent silence.

"Nothing," she answered.

"Has nothing new occurred? Have you not—quarreled again?"

"No. We have not quarreled. But he treats me so

coldly. He knows that he has wronged me, yet he appears as though the opposite were the case."

She hesitated again. And then, speaking rapidly she continued:

"I feel that it is wrong for me to confide in you thus. But what else can I do? Can I submit tamely to his injustice? I wish you would tell me what to do. I would abide by your dicision. You have proven yourself better, nobler than I ever dreamed you could be. What shall I do? Tell me—tell me!"

How beautiful she was, in her anguish and helplessness. What could Philip Temple advise, loving her as he did? Could he tell her to go to her husband and throw herself at his feet, begging that they might be reconciled? Did she really desire a reconciliation with Chester Boynton?

Philip Temple had more than once convinced himself that Tracy did not love her husband at all. He had arrived, long ago, at a conviction that, in spite of the bonds binding her to another, she loved *him!* If this were true, what advice could he offer?

The situation was one in which he could not reason calmly. The charm of her nearness was upon him. They were alone, amid the gathering tints of twilight; her hands rested unresistingly in his; he could hear the tumultuous throbbing of her heart in the breathless silence.

He bent his face nearer hers; for a brief space of time he cast off the restraint upon his emotions which he had only maintained under a most severe tension of control.

"Oh, my darling!" he exclaimed, scarce above a whisper. "Yes, I *will* say it, Tracy—I *must* say it, if you kill me—if *he* kills me," he went on, as her hands fluttered in his like imprisoned birds. "I love you, as the saints love heaven! By divine right, you belong to me—you never belonged to him. You made a terrible mistake; you never cared for him as you ought; you have cared more for me from the first."

The look of mingled anguish and apprehension that

came into her eyes condemned him even as he spoke. But, like a torrent which has once broken forth from its bounds, his passionate utterance ran on unmindful of the pain he might inflict, or the lasting disgrace or terrible consequences which he might entail upon her as well as himself.

"You do not deny it," he continued, his tones growing less vehement and more eager. "Your face, your eyes, your silence, your trembling, all tell me the sweet, yet bitter truth. Let your lips utter it also—just once! Say that you do, that you have loved me—say it with your lips! And then, if you bid me leave you, and go to the farthest ends of the earth, I will meekly obey. But I cannot go without the boon I ask—the boon of that sweetest of words, if it be only whispered, or shaped by those lips! Tracy, Tracy! Why are you silent?"

She had grown deathly white while he was speaking. It was plain that he was subjecting her to a terrible strain. Her lips fluttered, she struggled to free her hands, she recoiled from him, as though in sudden horror.

"Philip—Mr. Temple—why, why—." Her utterance seemed choked; she tottered in sudden, over-powering faintness; he caught her, white and silent, in his arms; she had swooned.

But those faltered words, and the look of horror upon her countenance brought him, with a shock, to a full realization of what he had said—of what he had implored her to confess. In that moment Philip Temple loathed himself, as he could have loathed no other human being. To have been the instrument of inflicting such pain to this helpless, friendless woman; to cause her to swoon in very horror at his vehement, sinful utterance—what greater punishment could an avenging angel have inflicted upon the sensitive soul of a man!

So absorbed was he that he did not hear the sound of passing wheels. And not until Tracy was resuscitated, and he had accompanied her in silence back to the house, was he aware that there had been a new arrival at the Gridley dwelling.

CHAPTER XIX.

SHE RELENTS WITH PITY.

"First she relents
With pity; of that pity then repents." —*Prior.*

There is nothing so alluring as the paths which lead to danger.

They are strewn with fairest flowers, redolent with intoxicating perfumes, and bright with the witching glamor of silvery moonlight. Hope, and pleasure, and delight lay invitingly before; while darkness and difficulty close in behind. The descent is easy and agreeable; but to return, the way lies over seemingly inaccessible heights which we have not the heart nor the strength to climb.

Such had been the experience of Philip Temple; and in a lesser degree it was also that of Mrs. Boynton.

The fact of the frequent disagreements between Tracy and her husband had led the latter to seek the more agreeable society of her former lover. In doing this she had no intention of wrong, in act or thought. There is a purity of heart which is above self-distrust. Such was hers. A suggestion of wrong was a shock to her—hence the keenness of her resentment under the jealous charges of her husband, for not once had she entertained an unfaithful thought.

That she was pleased by Philip's companionship could not be denied. She knew, from the moment of their meeting upon the mountain-side that she still possessed the truest devotion of his heart. This she could not help. She could not blame him, either, for his passion had begun, and matured, when it had a right to do so. She even felt that, in some way, she ought to show him that she admired his fidelity, which in men is so rare; and in cultivating friendly relations, and attempting to throw off the embarrassing restraint which the memory of the

past might exercise over them, she overstepped the bounds of prudence.

In all this she was innocent. Even the secret delight which she felt in still possessing Temple's preference was innocent, because she did not realize the possible danger of entertaining it.

It is a pleasure to woman to be beloved. There is a subtle fascination in the possession of this power over hearts—a fascination which sometimes leads to danger, sometimes to coquetry, and often to life-long misery. Yet, in the beginning, danger and misery are unthought of.

With Tracy and Philip there had been a steady, swift drifting toward the crisis which had now been reached.

The point beyond which Temple's generous, honorable nature could not safely go had been passed, and with the result which in another he would have been keen enough to foresee.

Ah! if those passionate words could only be recalled! If, with his newly learned wisdom, he could only be permitted to go back, and exercise the self-control and prudence which were now possible to him.

Before his departure the next morning he only saw Mrs. Boynton for a brief instant as they both chanced to meet in a room through which they were hastily passing.

Her face was very pale; but as she met his glance, he saw pity, reproach, yet no anger expressed in her look.

"You can not condemn me so utterly as I condemn myself, Mrs. Boynton," he said, in a low, unsteady tone.

"The fault was not wholly yours; I led you to it, in my own blindness," she answered.

For a moment he lingered. Then, turning away, he hastily said:

"You had best tell your husband all, and then he will condemn me and not you. I do not misunderstand you now. Mr. Boynton will honor you when he knows the truth."

He did not say good-by, nor did she respond to his

parting injunction. Both passed on, and a few moments later Philip Temple was being driven rapidly away from the Gridley dwelling.

Tracy had not yet seen Mr. Brock, although she knew the evening before that he had arrived. But as she entered the next room, she met him face to face.

"Couldn't keep away from your husband forever, you see," he declared, with his slow, cold smile.

She barely touched, with her fingers, the hand which he extended in greeting. She could scarce repress a shudder in the contact. He could not have failed to note her aversion, and just the suspicion of a frown for a moment darkened his brow.

But his tones lost none of their affability, as he continued speaking.

"They miss you at the hotel at a tremendous rate, Mrs. Boynton," he continued. He had retreated to a window, through which a flood of yellow sunlight was shining.

"Miss Wentworth, in particular, desired me to inquire if you were not coming back pretty soon. She was decidedly down-in-the-mouth yesterday about nothing. So much so that she seemed actually to enjoy my society. Another falling out with that fickle lover of hers, it's likely. Pity they couldn't separate for good!"

Mr. Brock shrugged his shoulders as he voiced this sentiment.

Tracy found herself strangely fascinated by his remarks. She experienced a wish to combat him, in some way; for his every characteristic and expressed opinion was repellant to her.

"Why do you wish them to separate?" she demanded, a flash of indignation in her tones.

"Better for them both," he tersely replied.

"And why better?" she persisted.

"Save separating when it would be more embarrassing all around. Lovers can part, and their good names will survive. But married people kick up the biggest kind of

a dust with their reputations in separating, or getting divorced."

If there was a hidden significance in this remark, Tracy failed to preceive it.

"Because they quarrel now is no indication that they may not live happily when married," she warmly asserted.

"Isn't it?" He shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Perhaps not," he added.

"Do you think it is?"

She seemed bent upon showing her antagonism.

"I suppose not, if you say so. You've married and I'm a bachelor. So we have a right to differ, though your ideas are entitled to more respect than mine."

The innuendo conveyed was not lost upon Tracy.

Her face flushed with sudden anger.

"Why do you say that?" she demanded.

"I don't know—my oddity, I suppose."

"I believe you meant to—to insult me," she cried.

"Oh, no! Beg pardon. I thought we were friendly. But never mind—we can disagree and still be friends, can't we? Your husband is a famous friend of mine. He understands me. You are a little prejudiced on account of something offensive in my looks or speech. But I'm not to blame for either. I've no ill will toward you. I'm blunt in my ways; I'm odd, and inclined to be cold when everybody else is too warm. That's constitutional. We won't quarrel about the temperature. I'll stand in the sun and you may stay out of it, and then we'll both by comfortable—eh?"

Tracy's indignation was restrained only by a strong effort.

She was convinced that this man liked her no better than she liked him. Yet he was an enigma to her. She could not analyze the cause for her own antipathy.

"You have no right to wish others to be unhappy because you can not sympathize with them in their joys," she said, more deliberately.

"That's true, Mrs. Boynton," he returned, with another shrug and smile.

"I own," he continued, "that I don't fancy this love-making. I may have my reasons, and I may not. But I don't like it. There's more unhappiness than good in it, the world over. Read history, biography, anything but romance, and you'll find it so. But that's no reason why *I* should interfere by a word, I admit. You're right and I'm wrong, same as you are when you say the day is warm and I say it's cold. This is a cold day to me. To you it's warm, else you'd change that pretty, sleazy white gown for a warmer one. You see we *can't* argue from the same standpoint. But we won't quarrel, eh! — going? No offense, I hope?"

"None," she coldly replied, passing from the room.

Did she imagine it, or did she hear a low chuckle from Mr. Brock, as the door closed between them?

He had arrived sometime the evening before—she did not know when. Philip had watched with Stacy, and Mr. Boynton had retired early for a sound night's sleep, so it was doubtful if Chester and Brock more than exchanged greetings the night of the latter's arrival.

But before the day had passed, they took one of their customary strolls together. They were absent longer than usual, and when they returned Mr. Boynton went directly to attend upon Stacy. His wife only met him at the table again that day, and then she was struck by a strange, cold pallor which had settled upon his countenance.

"Are you ill, Chester?" she questioned, as for a moment they were left alone.

"No," he answered, without looking at her.

"What, then, has happened?"

"Nothing."

"You are very pale."

"Am I?"

She went up to him and placed one hand upon his arm.

"I wish we might understand each other better!" she exclaimed, her tones full of eagerness.

He did not look at her. A scornful smile wreathed his lips.

"I think we know each other full well already," he replied.

"Are you not willing to be at peace with me? Can you not listen to what I have to say?"

The glance which he sent into her face caused her to recoil in startled dismay.

"There are extenuating circumstances, and I shall not be uncharitable!" he said, in a tone that seemed to freeze the blood in her veins.

The housekeeper came in at that moment, and Chester abruptly repaired to Stacy's room.

She did not see him again that night. In the morning, as she came down stairs, she met the younger Gridley in the small entry-way.

The youth leaned his chin upon one crutch and looked quizzically up into her face.

"Didn't you know he'd gone?" he asked, in his nasal tones.

"Gone!—whom?" she returned.

"Both of 'em!"

"Not—my husband?"

"Yes, and the cold chap."

"Where did they go?"

"I dunno."

"This morning?"

"No, last night. With a team. I thought you didn't know. Gi'n ye the slip."

Tracy clasped her hands, a sudden sense of nameless horror sweeping over her.

Chester and Mr. Brock gone—and they went last night!

What, *what* did it mean? Perhaps she was impressed by a premonition of what the dreadful sequel was to be.

CHAPTER XX.

TO NO REMORSE.

"Curse on the unpardoning prince whom tears can draw
To no remorse."

—*Dryden.*

Philip Temple spent the day—or all that remained of it—after his arrival at the Webb cottage in the most assiduous labor.

He ascended to the very summit of the mountain with indefatigable determination, and sketched, from various points of view, the landscape spread below.

His excessive industry was prompted by two impulses. The first, was to relieve the sense of remorse which was feeding upon his mind; the second, a desire to make use of the rare scenery before he should be obliged to leave the spot.

For he had firmly resolved not to see Tracy Boynton again. Upon her arrival at the hotel, he would leave the vicinity for good, to avoid all chance of meeting her.

Not that he distrusted his power of self-control. There was no further danger of his yielding to an overpowering sweep of passion, even if the opportunity or temptation were presented. The lesson had been thoroughly, terribly learned. He loathed his own weakness; his respect for Tracy's purity of soul was profound; he could meet her now daily without danger. He was now capable of alertness in the avoidance of what might be construed into an appearance of evil.

Therefore it was not for this that he desired to avoid meeting Mrs. Boynton again. His true reason was a simple one. He feared that he might prove an obstacle to the final reconciliation of husband and wife, through the jealousy which had already been excited in the former.

"He shall have her entirely to himself, as he ought,"

he mentally decided. "I will not even obtrude my friendship. And beside, what I said to her in that mad moment, though forgiven, cannot pass wholly from the memory. Therefore it would be hard for us ever to regain anything like a natural demeanor in each other's presence. I shall go away, and if we meet in after years she shall have no cause to shrink from me, nor her husband to regard me with distrust."

Such reflections as these flitted through his mind during the entire day, while he was busy with eye and pencil.

Never had he been capable of clearer discernment in the beauties of nature than upon that memorable day. Never had his hand been so deft in its execution, nor so facile in perfection.

So much good work, done within so short a period, had never been possible to him before. It is a singular, yet well proven fact that sometimes we find ourselves capable of marvelously perfect work while laboring under severe mental or physical depression. There is at such times a preternatural exaltation of the intellect by which the brain is stimulated beyond its normal capacity, while the hand gains a trueness of touch never attained before.

Philip returned to the cottage at nightfall and partook of a light supper. Then he started forth again.

Near the house he encountered Jason Webb.

"Not going to investigate that mystery to-night, be you?" the young farmer questioned.

"No. I wish to make a few moonlight sketches, for which the evening promises to be especially fine," was the reply.

"Going fur?"

"Up the mountain a short distance."

"Don't want any company, I 'spose?"

Philip hesitated.

Ordinarily he would not have objected to the society of the good-humored young man. But to-night he was in no mood for talking or listening. Beside, he could work faster alone. So he replied:

"You will pardon me, Mr. Webb, but your companionship is too agreeable. I can't work and talk, without spoiling both. And if you are with me I shall certainly talk, so the work will have to suffer. Otherwise, I should be only too glad to have you with me."

"That's all right, of course. Hope you'll have good luck."

"Thank you."

Philip turned into the path, leading toward the summer hotel—the fateful path whence the mysterious light was visible. He went only a few yards before stopping to glance back. He saw Jason Webb still gazing after him, and he had half a mind to alter his decision, and request his host to join him.

"Going to stay out late?" Webb called.

"Not very," Temple replied, still hesitating.

"Be in by ten o'clock, I suppose?"

"Yes, or before. Don't sit up for me however. I sha'n't want to stop work while the moon shines brightly. I can almost see to sketch without my lantern with such a moon."

Webb turned away and Temple hastened onward, for the sun had set already, and the red glow of the western horizon was fading in the white light of the moon, high in the heavens.

Philip ascended the mountain by a side path, reaching a bold, jutting rock from which a view of the whole valley could be obtained.

He lighted his lantern, adjusted a reflecting shade so as to throw the light upon his paper, and then commenced work.

Far below was the zigzag road, the sand gleaming white in contrast with the dark trees beyond. There were glimpses of the river, its surface like molten silver; there were several farm-houses, from which lights gleamed dully; and a partial view of the red-roofed hotel, and several summer cottages near it also came within the scope of the broad picture.

With such an enchanting model almost anyone, it seemed, could have made clever sketches. Philip had an artistic eye, and not a point of the perfect landscape escaped his appreciative glance.

The time passed swiftly, so deeply engaged did he become in his task. In truth the material for pictures constantly accumulated without a change of position. The moon, gliding along the azure dome made a constant change of outline, shifting the shadows, and illuming new points which had before been hidden, while others became obscured.

But presently the young man realized that he could not continue his work much longer. A glance at his watch caused him to leap to his feet in surprise.

Eleven o'clock already! And it would take half an hour, at the least calculation, to reach the cottage.

He commenced the descent without delay. It required care to pick his way, and he presently found that he had missed the route by which he came up, and was following another, though easier path. At length he reached the main path, at a point lying between the spot of mystery and the summer hotel. Hence he would be obliged to pass the "haunted" place to reach the cottage.

The prospect did not disturb him in the least. He felt some curiosity to see if the strange light would be there to tantalize his interest.

He had not proceeded a dozen steps along the path, however, before he became aware that some one was advancing toward him from the direction of Webb's. Was it his host, alarmed by his protracted absence?

He had not long to wait for an answer to his query, for he came face to face with the other.

"Mr. Boynton!" involuntarily broke from Temple's lips, as the other halted, barring his progress.

"So we have met," Chester Boynton returned, in a low, husky tone.

"Yes. But what has happened?"

Philip was struck by the strange tone and expression

of the other. That something had occurred he was vaguely conscious—something of a startling character.

"I have come to have a little talk with you," Chester returned.

"How did you find me?" Philip, in his bewilderment, did not know what else to say.

"I called at the Webb cottage, and they told me I should meet you if I patrolled this path. I should have persisted in doing so if I had not found you until morning. Did you think to elude me? You may well recoil, false betrayer of my confidence!"

Philip *did* recoil. There was something apalling in the tone and look of Chester Boynton.

"You need not be so vehement, Mr. Boynton," Temple returned, his calmness of voice in marked contrast with the harsh tone of the other.

"You had rather I would be mild and forgiving, I doubt not. But it is not in me to be so. I'm very human."

"I wish you would make a coherent charge, that I might answer it. It is cowardly to attack me without permitting me to arm for self-defense."

"Cowardly, is it? You are a fine man to speak of cowardice! Why didn't you remain and meet my wrath, like a man? I might have respected you then. Instead, you run away, like the base poltroon you are."

Temple had but recently learnt the lesson of self-control, but his late experience served to restrain him at this moment from what might have been a rash, unpardonable act.

"Then your wife has told you of my base folly?" he managed to ask.

"*She* told me—no!"

"Then what do you know that you did not know before I came away? I told her to tell you all. She is blameless—"

"Stop!" Boynton cried, interrupting.

"Do you expect me to credit a word you say?" he demanded.

"You may do as you wish. Mrs. Boynton will testify to my truthfulness."

"No doubt. She would swear to anything you pleased. But I do not depend upon her word nor yours. I have friends who will not allow me to be imposed upon."

With startling suddenness the truth flashed upon the brain of Philip Temple.

"Brock—the cold, sneaking villain—he is the spy!" he cried.

"How know you that? I would not have betrayed him."

"I know it because no one else is capable of the base action. Who else would attempt to part man and wife, and ruin the happiness of both? It is he who has poisoned your mind from the first."

"Well, suppose he did, if the truth were poison?"

"What has he told you, Mr. Boynton?"

"Something which you dare not deny!"

"I shall deny nothing that is true. But I desire the privilege of explaining to you whatever may appear to you in so terrible a light. God knows that I deserve almost the worst that you can say to me; but I wish to be condemned for what I have done, and not for what I have not done. And I insist that you know the truth, that your wife may be cleared from every shadow of doubt. You may well doubt me, but it is infamous in you to distrust her!"

A moment of silence fell between them.

The breathing of the two men was audible to each other, so still it was about them.

The shadows had lengthened and deepened. The moonlight rested upon the tree tops, and upon the face of the mountain; but where they stood it was growing rapidly dark.

"What you say sounds very fine," Boynton said, at last.

"Will you allow me to make my own confession?"

"Yes."

"Then listen."

Philip rapidly detailed what had passed between Tracy and himself at the Gridley dwelling, and upon their journey thither. He came to the evening before his departure from Gridley's. This was the hardest part of all. He began, repeating every word of that preliminary conversation with Tracy, which had preceded his own passionate outburst. Before confessing the latter he hesitated.

"Go on," Boynton commanded. "You haven't reached the climax yet, I know. Remember, Mr. Brock passed at a very important moment. Tell the whole—don't you withhold a single syllable!"

"You need have no fears—I shall not spare myself," Temple replied.

And he did not. Everything was told. And in conclusion he said:

"Now you know the truth—that your wife is as noble as you could wish her to be; that her honor is as spotless as—"

"Stop!" Boynton again cried. His hands were clenched, his face fairly livid with passion.

CHAPTER XXI.

WOMANLY INGENUITY.

"Now withered murder, with his stealthy pace,
Moves like a ghost."

—*Shakspeare.*

"Womanly ingenuity set to work by womanly compassion."

—*Macaulay.*

"Curi's wa'n't it Jenny?"

For about the twentieth time in the last hour Jason Webb gave utterance to this query. And each time Jenny replied: "I can't help worrying about it, Jason!"

I was of Chester Boynton's strange looks when he had called to inquire for Philip Temple that these comments were uttered.

Boynton's appearance and speech filled them first, with wonder and later with vague alarm. For the clock had struck twelve, and their boarder had not appeared.

"What keeps him so? You don't suppose—" Jenny interrupted herself, and looked into the face of her husband.

It was late for them to be sitting up; yet they were wide awake. The oil burned low in the lamp which stood on the table between them. Jason had made a pretense of reading his newspaper for some time. But now he flung it down and sprang to his feet.

"I'm going to meet him," he declared, decisively.

"May be he won't like it," she suggested.

"I don't care—he may lump it, then."

"I guess I'll go, too," said Mrs. Webb, rising and throwing a shawl over her graceful shoulders.

"What for?" her husband remonstrated.

"I don't want to stay here alone," was the cleverly contrived response.

"Well, come along."

They went out, locking the door after them. Only the higher points of the landscape were now lighted by the

rays of the declining moon. The hollows and level spaces were all in shadow, and the gloom enshrouding them constantly deepened.

They struck into the path, and walked, at first, slowly, but as they proceeded quickening their pace.

A deathlike stillness reigned. Occasionally a light breeze whispered in the tree-tops; once, at a great distance a whippoorwill's cry was faintly audible. The Webbs paused as they heard it, thinking it was the cry of a human being. But they speedily discovered their mistake, and moved on again.

"Do you suppose we shall see that strange light?" Jenny queried, clinging close to the arm of her husband.

"Like enough."

"What shall we do?"

"Let it shine. Who cares, so long as no harm is done?"

"There was harm done to you the other night."

"There wouldn't have been if I hadn't been careless."

There was another interval of silence. Then she spoke again:

"It is strange we don't meet him!"

"Mr. Temple?"

"Yes."

"So it is. I wonder what Mr. Boynton wanted of him?"

"I don't know. And yet—" She hesitated, glancing cautiously backward.

"What is it, Jenny?"

"I heard something yesterday."

"You heard what?"

"A piece of gossip, you will say."

"From Rice's wife?"

"She got it from some of the servants over at the summer hotel."

"Well, what did she hear."

"You don't like gossip, Jason!" She laughed mischievously, indicating that he had "lectured" her upon

the weakness of her sex at some time in the past, for which she could now be revenged.

"Well, I don't, that's certain," he said in a crestfallen way. He continued:

"But I thought you were going to say something about Boynton—something that might explain his strange appearance of to-night."

"So I was."

"Then go on—don't bother!"

She lowered her tones almost to a whisper.

"They say that Mr. Temple—*our* Mr. Temple—and Mrs. Boynton think a great deal of each other," she declared, with slow emphasis.

"Eh!"

"And that they were engaged before she married this man. If that is *true*, Mr. Boynton may have been jealous to-night."

"So he might, if it *is* true. But it may be all moonshine. Those servants are fearful gossips, and Jim's wife is a whole team at story-telling. Don't you repeat it to a soul, Jenny!"

"You needn't be afraid of my doing it. I oughtn't to have told you, I suppose."

"Perhaps not."

They were silent again. They had reached the "haunted" spot, and both involuntarily glanced toward the place where the mysterious light usually shone.

"It isn't there, for a wonder!" Jason exclaimed.

They passed on in silence. But they had proceeded less than a dozen paces when Jenny suddenly came to a halt, clutching the arm of her companion.

"What is that?"

She pointed at a dark object lying across the path.

"A log of wood—isn't it?" he returned, more quiet-nerved. They both advanced, bent nearer the object, and then recoiled, an ejaculation breaking from the lips of Jason, a scream from his wife.

It was *not* a log of wood lying across the path. It was

a man, and he lay as motionless and silent as though he were dead.

"Oh, mercy!" Mrs. Webb cried, in frantic horror.

"Don't take on so—he may not be dead," said Jason, reassuringly.

He bent over the motionless form, Jenny standing near with clasped hands and pallid face. The figure lay upon its face, and as Webb gently turned him over upon his back, he saw that it was Philip Temple—his face blanched, and smeared with blood.

"He has been murdered! Mr. Boynton murdered him!" Jenny exclaimed, wringing her hands.

"Hush!" admonished her husband. "It isn't safe for you to say that, Jenny," he continued. "We hain't no right to charge the crime ag'in anybody, and we better be careful. Maybe he isn't dead. I don't b'lieve he is. He isn't cold, anyhow. But we mustn't stand here and do nothing. Can't you run over to the hotel and tell 'em?"

"No, no! I can't alone."

"Of course you needn't. I hadn't ought to asked you. The first thing is to see if he is alive, and if he is the next thing is to get him to the house as lively as ever we can. If he's dead, then we can both go to the hotel and tell 'em. I wish *he* hadn't called to inquire for Mr. Temple at our house. I wish we didn't know nothing about it. We'll be witnesses don't you see?"

While speaking, Webb had not been idle. He tore open the young man's shirt and placed his hand over his heart.

"He's dead—no, he isn't!" he exclaimed, in rapid contradiction.

"He's alive, but scarcely. Why in blazes didn't I fetch my lantern? Can you help me to carry him, so that we sha'n't hurt him more'n can be helped? I'll bear his heft, and you can stiddy him a little. Ready?"

She was ready. Gently they raised the unfortunate young man, tears from Jenny's eyes falling upon his

white face as they did so. And then, slowly, carefully they made their way toward the cottage. Never did the distance seem so great, nor the path so full of stones and pieces of dead wood. Their arms ached, and they were in a fever of anxiety for fear that the delay would preclude the possibility of saving the young man's life.

What if he should die while they were bearing him to the cottage? Would it not have better to have left him where he lay and hastened for help?

They saw the light from their own window at last. In another moment they had entered, and the young man, white and dreadfully still, was laid upon his own bed.

Once more Jason felt for his heart-beats, and once more he was reassured.

"You hitch up the team and ride for the doctor," Jenny exclaimed, growing brave when she realized that the case was not a hopeless one, and that there was something for them to do.

"I will get some water hot, and see if I can't fetch him to while you're gone," she continued, beginning to bustle around the rooms.

She brought out a bottle of brandy, which was kept in the house "against a case of sickness," and forced a few drops of it between the closed lips of the patient. A fire was made to burn in the kitchen range, and the tea-kettle sang as merrily as though it were not a most dreadful and solemn occasion.

Jason did not stop a moment. Jenny heard the rattle of his buggy as he drove away down the road, and said to herself:

"He won't be gone long, I know, and when the doctor comes we shall know the worst. I do hope he'll live. It is so dreadful to have a *murder* committed almost in your own family, as you might say. And beside, I don't believe Mr. Temple deserves such a dreadful fate. He is an honest looking chap, and that frank in his ways that nobody would suspect him of doing wrong. And a gen-

tleman, too, though not ashamed to talk with poor folks like Jason and me as though we were as good as he."

Thus the busy woman ran on, keeping herself company with the sound of her own cheery voice. And all the while she worked over the unfortunate young man.

There was no wound upon the latter save upon his head. He had been felled by a heavy blow upon the temple.

There were other bruises about his head, as though his assailant had followed up his cruel attack even after his victim was defenseless.

Mrs. Webb had plenty of presence of mind and a liberal degree of good sense, therefore her ministrations to the injured man were not wholly unsuccessful; and she certainly rendered his chances no worse, as too many might have done under the circumstances.

The rattle of wheels sounded at last. The door was opened without ceremony, and a short, round-faced man came in. He nodded to Jenny, went directly to the bedside of Mr. Temple, and bent over the latter.

Jason came in just as the doctor had finished his examination.

"A bad case!" declared the physician, deliberately facing the eager watchers.

CHAPTER XXII.

HER FAILING.

"Her failing, while her faith to me remains, I would conceal."
—*Milton.*

It was early the next morning that a horse and carriage drew up before Vinton's retreat. It was a livery team from the neighboring village; and it was a stable boy who alighted and assisted his lady passenger to do the same.

"Tracy—is it you?" cried Lou Wentworth, who was an early riser, and was consequently out upon the veranda, watching the white mist as it was wafted away across the valley by the light breeze. As her gaze fell upon the countenance of her friend, however, a cry of alarm broke from her lips.

"What is it?—what has happened?" she eagerly questioned, for Mrs. Boynton's face was deathly white, and there was a look about her eyes that betokened a sleepless night.

"Is he here?" Tracy breathlessly questioned.

"Whom do you mean?"

"My husband."

"I don't know—I haven't seen him. I heard someone say that Mr. Brock had come."

"They were together—they came last night," Tracy rapidly uttered. The boy had driven off, and they stood alone upon the veranda, holding each other's hands, and face to face.

"Tell me, what has happened?" Lou implored, in an agony of apprehension.

"Oh! how can I tell you, or anyone!" Mrs. Boynton covered her face with her hands for a moment, and was silent. Then she looked at her friend again, and it was plain that she was exercising an almost iron control upon her emotions.

"I *must* be calm," she said, more slowly."

"Have you had trouble—with each other?" Lou questioned, in a tone scarce above a whisper. For her observant eyes had perceived, upon more than one occasion, that husband and wife did not always agree.

"I can't stop to tell you now—you shall know all in due time," Mrs. Boynton replied, and she added:

"First I must know if Chester is here; and if he is, I must see him. Perhaps I apprehend too great evils. I am excited; my nerves are overwrought."

She hastened into the house, ascended to her rooms, and entered. Someone was sitting in a large easy chair by the window. He did not stir as she entered. She advanced and saw that it was Chester, and that he was asleep.

But he aroused as she approached, and started to his feet.

"Tracy!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—I couldn't wait for you to come back," she returned, going up to him.

He stared at her for a moment in a blank, bewildered way. Then he took her hands in his, and gazed earnestly down into her face.

"Why did you follow me?" he asked slowly.

"Because, I feared—I know not what."

"*What* did you fear?"

"That you had gone to see *him*."

"Mr. Temple, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"And suppose I did—what of that?"

His face darkened as she uttered no response, and there was half-suppressed passion in his tones as he continued:

"So you couldn't trust me to deal justly with him? You feared that I *might* be just, perhaps! Can it be that you dared not trust your heart's idol to my hands, lest he suffer?"

"Chester—Chester!" she cried, clinging to his arm, and tears streaming from her eyes.

Her tone, the expression of anguish upon her beautiful face, touched him, even in his jealous frenzy.

"Forgive me, Tracy! I did not mean that," he said, relenting.

And he went on, as she stood, in that beseeching attitude before him:

"I ought not to be so harsh toward you, I know. The fault is not yours, except to a slight degree. I have not ministered to your happiness as I might have done; and it is no wonder that you love him better; than me. But—"

"Stop!" she uttered, almost sternly. He was silent, amazed by the imperativeness of her tone and the gesture accompanying it.

"I do *not* love Philip Temple better than you—I do not love him at all," she cried, speaking rapidly. "I never loved him—had I done so, I should not have become your wife. Yet I confess that I prized his friendship, that I was charmed by his speech, and admired the chivalrous character which, in spite of his weakness, I know he possesses. But that is not love. Oh! why have you distrusted me so? Why have you been so blind to the truth? It was your growing distrust which has been sundering our hearts. You should have had more faith in the honor of her whom you have made your wife. Your violent jealousy frightened me. Your sudden departure last night nearly drove me frantic, for, in the mood which I feared you were in, I dare not think what rash thing you might do."

While she was speaking a gradual change came over his countenance. There seemed to be, within his heart, a struggle betwixt doubt and conviction. But jealousy, once it finds root in the human heart is the most stubborn of passions to subdue. It is not satisfied with cold proofs. It feeds, and burns within itself.

As they stood thus, she gazing imploringly up into his face, he with downcast eyes, there came a sharp, quick knock at the door.

Tracy started back, oppressed by a sense of impending ill. Her husband, with an impatient frown hastened to the door and flung it open. Two men stood outside. One was a large, coarse-featured person, with small, shrewd eyes; the other was Jason Webb. The face of the latter was stern; of the former determined.

"This Mr. Boynton?" the large man inquired, in a gruff tone.

"Yes, sir."

"Chester Boynton?"—fumbling in his breast pocket.

"That is my name. Oblige me with stating your business? This is a rather early hour for a stranger to intrude."

"It is, rather. But business is business. I've intruded on folks at more unseasonable times than this. Hauled one chap right out of bed not long ago—been stealing you understand."

He had by this time produced the document for which he had been fumbling in his pockets.

"I have a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Boynton, upon a charge of a probably successful attempt upon the life of Philip Temple—for the doctor says he must die. Better not make any trouble. As you look like a gentleman I won't put the wristlets on if you're peaceable!"

The man clapped one brawny hand upon Boynton's shoulder as he spoke. At the same time Tracy sprang between them frantically crying:

"He is innocent!—I know he is innocent!—he would never do that, never, *never!*"

The sheriff gently pushed her aside. The gruffness of his manner all vanished at sight of her beauty and the anguish of her countenance.

"This is too bad, I declare!" he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders. But fortunately, perhaps, the young wife could withstand no further strain upon her senses. For, at that moment, she was overcome with faintness, and sank in a swoon at the officer's feet.

There was confusion in the hotel at once. It had al-

ready become noised among the guests that an officer had come to arrest Chester Boynton for murder, and the corridor became crowded with servants of the house and friends of the unfortunate couple.

"I will go with you," Boynton declared, as soon as he could find voice to speak. "But," he continued, in a tone of wonderful calmness, "I assure you to begin with that you have made a grave mistake. I am innocent of any crime; I saw Mr. Temple in all his health and strength last night, and parted from him with no thought of violence."

"That may all be," the sheriff replied. "I don't convict you, bear in mind. But the charge is backed up pretty strong, and I must do my duty."

Before leaving the corridor, Boynton espied Lou Wentworth, and hastily said to her as he passed:

"Take care of my poor darling; see that nothing for her comfort is left undone. Tell her that I am innocent. I know that the test will be a severe one to her, but if she withstands it, the angels of heaven could never shake my confidence in her again!"

This was all he had time to say; and in another moment he was hurried away by the impatient officer.

* * * * * * * * *

Mrs. Boynton, upon recovering consciousness, recovered at the same time her usual calmness. Now that the worst had happened, the tension to which her nerves had been subjected was slackened, and she became marvelously cool and self-possessed.

"Yes, Chester is innocent as I am," she repeatedly declared in the long interview which she presently held with Roy Blanchard and Lou Wentworth—for to them alone did she feel like entrusting the many things which the emergency required to be done. Roy developed, at this time, a surprising amount of sound judgment, and a knowledge of what the occasion required. He had seen Jason Webb, and obtained from him the evidence which certainly made the case a dark one for Chester Boynton.

"If Mr. Temple is still alive, cannot the truth be obtained from him?" Lou questioned.

"He hasn't spoken a word since the Webbs discovered him," Roy answered, gravely.

"Doesn't the doctor give any hope?"

"Very little."

"And if he *should* die, without recovering consciousness?"

"The case would be a dark one, that is all. But we'll hope for the best. In the meantime we must get legal counsel for Mr. Boynton. He must have the best."

Roy went away upon this important errand. He consulted with Mr. Boynton, who was locked into a room in the village court-house —for the place could boast of no jail. An attempt to obtain Chester's release under bail was made, but without success. The case was too grave a one—for, as the hours passed, it became almost a certainty that Philip Temple would die. Mr. Boynton must await the result of the crime, and if it terminated fatally, then he would be required to answer to the charge of *murder*.

Tracy visited him also; and when she came forth, and entered the carriage in which Lou and Roy were waiting for her, there was a look of tearful joy upon her beautiful face—such an expression as they had never seen there before.

They did not ask the cause. Instinctively they knew the truth, before she said to them, after a long period of silence:

"Whatever comes, we trust each other. And when he is cleared of this dreadful suspicion we shall begin a new life, into which no distrust or lack of harmony can enter."

This was all she said to them then. And in her new happiness—the joy of reconciliation—she seemed for the time to almost forget the dreadful danger menacing her husband.

The days that immediately followed were full of pain-

ful suspense. At the Webb cottage the victim of that terrible crime, Philip Temple, lay pale and unconscious, his life hanging by a thread. Tracy visited the cottage every day; and she spent many an hour at the bedside of her former lover, ministering to his needs with all the tenderness of a sister.

"Oh, live, *live!*" she implored in her gentle tones, whenever she was left alone in the room with the patient. Upon one of these occasions he opened his eyes and fixed them upon her face. It seemed as though he recognized her—as though he were about to speak. With intense eagerness she bent over him.

"Philip, do you not know me?" she softly questioned.

His lips moved; his face lighted up. With mad eagerness she bent her face closer to his, breathlessly exclaiming:

"Tell me, Philip, who struck you? I am Tracy—don't you see? Tell me who struck the cruel blow?"

Would he answer? It seemed for a moment as though he would surely do so. A wild, swift prayer went up from her heart. But the next moment she drew back with a cry of dispair. For Philip had closed his eyes; the look of recognition faded from his face; he sank into the heavy stupor which had characterized his illness from the first.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF IT ALL.

"The tale repeated o'er and o'er,
With change of place and change of name,
Disguised, transformed, and yet the same,
We've heard a hundred times before."

—*Longfellow.*

"The doctor says he may live, but that he cannot recover his memory of past events for months; perhaps never."

Roy Blanchard said this to Lou, as they walked slowly away from the Webb cottage, nearly two weeks the events just described.

The hour was near sunset. The air was pure and sweet, after a balmy September day. Roy and Lou were also among the frequent visitors at the cottage, and they nearly always went together.

During these two weeks they had got along very harmoniously. Perhaps this was because they had not ventured upon anything like love making during the entire period, as they had been deeply engaged by the troubles of their friends.

"How, then, will Mr. Boynton's case ever be settled?" Lou questioned.

"If Mr. Temple lives, the sentence will not be so heavy, at least. But there will certainly be a sentence of some severity, and Mr. Boynton must remain under the shadow of a most terrible crime!"

This was rather gloomily spoken, and Lou made no response. For several moments they walked onward in silence. Suddenly Roy paused and sank upon a flat rock beside the path. Lou looked at him in surprise.

"Why have you stopped here?" she asked.

"It is a good place to get rested," he answered.

"Are you tired?"

"Yes, rather. Aren't you? I wish you would sit here

with me. I haven't had a good talk with you for a long while."

She hesitated.

"I think I'm not tired," she slowly declared. Yet she allowed him to draw her to a seat by his side.

"Don't you think it is about time that we got better acquainted with each other?" he asked.

"I thought we were pretty well acquainted already," she demurely answered.

"It is all upon one side. You understand me well enough, I'm sure. You can see that I am miserable nearly all the time—miserable because of my uncertainty. If I only knew whether you loved me, or were plotting to make a misanthrope of me. If I only knew."

She looked at him in vague wonder. There was a deal of passionate earnestness expressed in his tones. Was it real or feigned? Lou Wentworth's heart throbbed with a sudden hope. *Was* he in earnest, after all? If so, why did he not speak plainly? If he loved her, and wished her to be his wife, why did he not tell her so?

"I'm going to take the risks," Roy went on, with a determined air. "I'm not going to remain in doubt another hour. I cannot suffer from humiliated pride now; it is only my heart that can suffer, and in that I have no rest already."

He paused, looking at her with beseeching earnestness. Her face was half-averted; her eyes drooped.

"Whenever I have approached you in anything like an earnest manner," he continued, "you have treated me with a lightness which has warned me off. I have tried very hard to satisfy myself that what I have heard concerning you was false, but I have been baffled by your guardedness. But I shall not be frightened off again. If you have the heart to add me to the list of your victims you may do so. I am in your power—be unmerciful if you will."

She interrupted him by a sudden, imperative gesture.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, an indignant flash in her tones. He hesitated, and she went on:

"Tell me—why do you speak of me in that way? Whom do you mean by my list of victims? Do you accuse me of winning hearts and casting them off?"

He half rose to his feet; he caught her hands in both his own, holding them fast.

"Isn't it true, then?" he questioned. "I was told that you were heartless, that you had ruined the existence of a worthy young man by coquetry. I was told that you delighted in the use of your power over the hearts of men; that you won them as a mere idle sport, and laughed at their folly. I was told all this before I saw you, and I was warned to keep out of your meshes. But in vain. I have loved you from the first, and I love you now as the saints love their patron! Lou, Lou!—*are* you heartless? Is it impossible for you to be won?"

"Who told you this?" she demanded, drawing away from him, as though in doubt.

"Tell me it is false, and you shall know who has been your traducer," he eagerly returned.

"It *is* false—every word. I never pretended to love anyone. I—I once rejected the love of one whom I had regarded only as a friend. But I never encouraged him, and that his heart was not broken is proven by his marrying a later choice—and for love, too."

Possibly she would have said more if he had permitted. But he did not. He drew her to his heart in a close embrace, a flood of words springing from his lips—such words of fond endearment as only a first true love can inspire. Blushing, trembling, with tears of unutterable joy in her eyes, she yielded herself to his strong, enfolding arms.

How the moments of that sweet silence flew! How short human life would be if all its moments sped thus!

She drew herself shyly away at length, and they seated themselves upon the rock. He still clung to her hands, caressing them.

"How strange that we should misunderstand each other so long," she softly exclaimed, gazing out among the deepening shadows.

"It is not strange, under the conditions of our acquaintance. I was warned against you, and like a blind fool I resolved not to love you. I resolved that you should not triumph over me, as you had done over other victims. That is why I appeared so fickle. My impulses would at times make me betray myself, and then when I imagined you were trying to draw me on to make a declaration of my love I would become guarded again. And you loved me all the while, darling? Did you?"

"Yes!" Very softly the word was spoken. More time fleeted past. And then, eagerly:

"But you have not told me the name of the enemy who traduced me?"

He hesitated. Then he replied:

"I half distrusted him all the while. And yet I could not see why he should wish to keep us apart. It was Mr. Brock!"

"The villain!" she cried. "He would not let anyone in the world be happy if he could help it. He would like to have everyone lonely, and bitter, and shivering in the cold, like himself. He tried to separate Mr. Boynton and Tracy. But for him her husband would never have been jealous. But, like a serpent, Mr. Brock fascinated his victim, winning his confidence. Then, upon the evening that Philip Temple was first at the hotel, and he and Tracy sat upon the veranda together, Mr. Brock and her husband were out upon one of their strolls together. When they returned, Tracy was frightened by Mr. Boynton's appearance. He did not explain the cause until since his arrest. Then he told her that Mr. Brock told him the story of *his* life. How that he wedded, years ago, a beautiful girl; how he nearly worshiped her, how he was then like other men, full of confidence in his fellow beings; and how his wife was won by a former lover, and lost to him, plunging him into life-long

misery, and causing him to become the misanthrope he is. He told the story in such painfully vivid language that it made a strong impression upon the mind of Mr. Boynton. And then his jealousy was born, for, from Brock, he also learned that Tracy and Mr. Temple were once betrothed lovers. Brock has been the serpent in Eden from the first."

"And to think how near he came to keeping us apart, too! I could throttle the villain!" Roy vehemently exclaimed.

A minute later Lou sprang to her feet.

"See—how dark it is growing," she cried.

In their new-found joy they had not noticed that the twilight had deepened into darkness. There was no moon, and there were cloud-patches overhead.

"We must go back, and hasten, too," Lou eagerly declared. She shivered as she glanced toward the darkness into which they must go. She thought of the mysterious light; of the fatal attack upon Philip Temple; of the wild, strange stories concerning the locality which were afloat.

Together they moved along the path. As they neared the spot at which the strange light was usually seen, Lou clung more closely to the arm of her companion.

When they reached the spot, both instinctively glanced toward the place whence the light was accustomed to shine. But it was not there. The spot was enshrouded in densest gloom. But as they moved on, they heard the muffled tread of a horse. They paused, and withdrew themselves from the path. Lou trembled violently; and Roy, in spite of his accustomed self-possession, was instinctively impressed by a sense of impending events.

The horse drew nearer; then the sound of voices became audible. These continued for several moments. Then there were other sounds—a shout, the rapid tramp of many feet, the galloping of a horse, and several objects sped past the place of our friends' concealment. An instant later there were other shouts, seemingly in pursuit;

lights flashed athwart the gloom; and last, with startling nearness, the sound of a pistol shot.

Roy saw a man, who was running part of the moment stumble and fall headlong to the earth, uttering a low cry of pain. A moment later two men with lanterns rushed upon the scene, and one of them bent over the one who had fallen. Roy recognized both of the newcomers. One was Jim Rice, the other the village sheriff. And at the same time others appeared, who were unmistakably constables. Several ran on in pursuit of the fugitives.

"We've got one of the rascals, anyhow," Rice exclaimed.

"Is he dead?" the sheriff asked.

"No."

"We'll take him along with us, then, and make him 'peach' on the others."

Roy Blanchard at this moment stepped into the path, Lou clinging to his arm, pallid with fear.

Jim Rice and the sheriff starred at them in open-mouthed astonishment.

"What is the meaning of this?" Roy demanded.

"Hoss-thieves," Rice laconically answered. He stood over the fallen stranger, tall and gaunt, swinging his lantern to and fro.

"They stole my hoss a spell ago, and they've stole four or five at the village afore this. And last night they got three more from the livery-stable. We've been watchin' for 'em, and now we've got on their track. And I guess when we get 'em all in the lockup that mysterious light won't puzzle folks yonder."

Roy listened to this piece of information with unconcealed eagerness. A sudden, startling suspicion had taken possession of his brain. He bent over the fallen thief, who lay in sullen silence staring up into their faces.

"Tell me, man," Roy Blanchard cried, gazing down into the face of the ruffian, "do you know whom struck

down Philip Temple two weeks ago this night? If you know, speak and save an innocent man from condemnation."

The man compressed his lips; for a moment he hesitated.

"If I should tell you?" he presently asked in a husky tone.

"All that influence and money can do for you shall be done," was the quick reply.

"All right. I didn't knock the chap down, and the one that's arrested didn't, neither. The cap'n did it—the boss of our gang. The young chap was too persistent trying to find out what our signal light meant, and so the boss served him as he did young Webb—only this chap, 'cording to all accounts, got the heaviest rap. Pretty nigh killed him, didn't it?"

Who can depict the eager delight with which Roy Blanchard and Lou Wentworth listened to this confession, made there by the weird light of swaying lanterns, with the dark shadows all around them? Or describe their haste back to the hotel, and the joy which they brought to the beautiful, faithful wife.

"I knew Chester was innocent!" Tracy repeatedly cried, in the ecstacy of her joy. "I knew God would not let him suffer for another's crime!"

* * * * * * *

It is not in the fate of the horse thieves, who had so long held their mountain retreat, unsuspected by those who lived below, that the reader is most interested. Nor do you care whether Jim Rice, and the village people recovered their missing horses or not. You may have a passing interest to know that Mr. Stacy recovered from his fractured limb; that Jason Webb and his brave little wife continued to live in simple prosperity, a whole world to each other. You have a deeper anxiety for Philip Temple, who had been called upon to suffer so much. You are curious to know what has become of the cold, snake-like Mr. Brock; the winsome Alma Burton;

perhaps you have a passing thought of the Gridleys, and of the other minor actors in our little drama.

Concerning the horse thieves, let it suffice that their capture and confessions cleared Chester Boynton from every dark suspicion. And, upon his release, he gave his personal attention to the case of Philip Temple, and through his influence one of the most noted physicians in the country was secured to concentrate his skill in the young man's behalf. The result was not achieved at once. There were weeks of uncertainty; but the efforts of his friends were at last crowned with success, and Philip got well—slowly, yet surely.

The next summer saw them all back at Vinton's Retreat—all save Mr. Temple and Brock. The latter went south for the winter; and it was thought that he found the tropical climate congenial, for he has not been seen at the north since. The reconciliation of Tracy and her husband was complete. Their experience, in which both were at fault, has taught them a lesson, and now their love and confidence is building upon surer foundations. They meet Philip occasionally. He and Chester are the warmest of friends. Yet the memory of his own folly—the giving way to that mad sweep of passion—can never be effaced. He will never marry. Of this we are sure, for, in his heart of hearts, he loves Tracy Boynton still; loves her the better for her faithfulness to her husband; for her strength, her purity, her honor. But there is no danger of his ever becoming weak again, for his regard for the wife of Chester Boynton, though deep and strong, is as chaste as that of a brother.

Roy and Lou were not married for nearly a year. Since their return from their wedding tour abroad they have dwelt near the home of the Boyntons, and in summer they go to the mountain retreat where they first met. And there they hold mock-quarrels; and pretend to misunderstand each other. Lou visits the magic spring and sees the face of her husband reflected there—for he leans over her shoulder at the moment. And so their lives go

on—not all brightness nor all poetry, to be sure, but as happy as true love ever is. It is Southey who said of love and its endurance:

"It is indestructible;
Its holy flame forever burneth:
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth.

THE END.

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